



YULE LOGS

BEING LONGMANS'
XMAS ANNUAL FOR
1898. EDITED BY...
G. A. HENTY.....



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YULE LOGS



"An Indian sprang up behind him."

Page 279.

Longmans' Christmas Annual for 1898

YULE LOGS

Edited by

G. A. Henty

With Sixty-one Illustrations



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CONTENTS

	PAGE
A FIGHTING MERMAID. By KIRK MUNROE	I
<i>Illustrated by</i> FRED. T. JANE.	
THE VENTURE OF THE "BERTHA" WHALER. By HENRY FRITH	39
<i>Illustrated by</i> W. H. OVEREND.	
A FRENCHMAN'S GRATITUDE. By Lieut.-Col. PERCY-GROVES	74
<i>Illustrated by</i> J. FINNEMORE.	
THE BADGE OF THE FOURTH FOOT. By ROBERT LEIGHTON	115
<i>Illustrated by</i> J. AYTON SYMINGTON.	
A DANGEROUS GAME. By G. MANVILLE FENN	155
<i>Illustrated by</i> C. J. STANILAND.	
BY DEFAULT OF THE ENGINEER. By FRANKLIN FOX	203
<i>Illustrated by</i> GORDON BROWNE.	
THE KING OF SPAIN'S WILL. By JOHN BLOUNDELLE-BURTON	236
<i>Illustrated by</i> ENOCH WARD.	
A NEW ENGLAND RAID. By E. F. POLLARD	271
<i>Illustrated by</i> GORDON BROWNE.	

	PAGE
SIR RICHARD'S SQUIRES. By CHARLES W. WHISTLER . . .	310
<i>Illustrated by R. WHEELWRIGHT.</i>	
THE SLAVER'S REVENGE. By HARRY COLLINGWOOD . . .	344
<i>Illustrated by TREVOR HADDON.</i>	
ON A MEXICAN RANCHE. By G. A. HENTY	383
<i>Illustrated by H. BIRD.</i>	

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

"An Indian sprang up behind him"	<i>Frontispiece</i>
	PAGE
"The strange tow, slowly making its way up the harbour"	13
"She hovered like a gigantic fish"	17
"Then two dripping figures scrambled aboard"	29
"The explosion, close under their bows, of a giant fire-cracker"	31
"The <i>Alfonso XIX.</i> lay in a glow of diffused light that seemed to come from beneath her very keel"	33
"Threw the whole harbour into an uproar of terror"	35
"The captain, overbalanced, dropped overboard, and disappeared in the raging sea"	43
"Hullo, my young spitfire ! so you want a lesson, do you?"	47
"What are those black things, Mr. Stevens?"	54
"In the dim light two curious objects appeared"	63
"The end appeared near"	69
"I immediately ran forward to the scene of action"	77
"Our gunners hammered away at Rosetta"	85
"Very cautiously we made our way down the sand-hills"	91
"As the fog cleared off, there appeared before us the Turkish army"	97
"Our standing ranks gave them a rattling volley"	105
"I dropped senseless to the ground"	111
"Suddenly a fluttering book flew past his curly head"	117
"Turned up a rusty old claymore"	124

	PAGE
"Alan refused to accept this offer of friendship"	135
"Colin handed him the lantern"	146
"Neil? my brother Neil?"	151
"Whisked himself round and held his tar-kettle and brush out like a pair of balances"	160
"Rev'nue cutter," said Hezz shortly	166
"A vigorous cut divided the fishing-line"	171
"A signal! came the next moment in answer"	181
"For there below him, lit up by a few lanterns, he could make out the hull of a great lugger"	186
"Oh," he cried, "there you are, sir!"	193
"Master Lahnce, lad!" cried the old man, making a grab at the boy's hand	201
"A quiet smoke"	205
"This is a pleasant prospect"	209
"Caught a firm grip of her dress"	214
"Uttering a wild yell, rushed off towards the nearest hut"	228
"Mr Urquhart tried the effect of the nine-pounders"	233
"Ran his finger along a map of France"	242
"We are soldiers, not——"	251
"Not so fast, mademoiselle, not so fast. What are you doing here?"	254
The Rescue	265
"A friendship that eventually ripened——"	269
"I was afraid, and hid myself in the long rushes"	273
"Quiet! Josiah Blackstone"	287
"Be on your guard"	295
"With a shout of triumph she leaped into the water"	303
"He fell forward dead in the black swamp"	307
"He came heavily to the roadside grass, where he lay stunned"	311

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

xi

	PAGE
"Sir Richard sat in his great chair on the daïs"	315
"I know where I am not wanted, at least"	323
"She seemed to care little"	327
"The next thing I knew was that my good steed was down on his nose among the stones"	336
"We were met by a ragamuffin crowd of swarthy, black-haired, fierce-eyed ruffians"	349
"A gang of some fifty negroes appeared"	367
"Borne aloft on a sort of rude throne supported upon the shoulders of eight stalwart negroes"	371
"She waved her hand above her head by way of farewell"	375
"Before he could pull the trigger I had struck up the weapon"	380
"Horses, when required, could be lassoed"	385
"Was often away on horseback with her dogs"	389
"The great assemblage of all the cattle, known as the round up"	403
"Shot an unusually fine mountain lion"	411
"I struck Violetta sharply and she galloped off like an arrow"	418
"A loud shout burst from the bushes as he issued out"	423

A FIGHTING MERMAID

BY KIRK MUNROE

Author of "The White Conquerors," "At War with Pontiac," "Through Swamp and Glade," "With Crockett and Bowie," &c. &c.

CHAPTER I

IT was a grand success. Every one said so ; and moreover, every one who witnessed the experiment predicted that the *Mermaid* would revolutionize naval warfare as completely as did the world-famous *Monitor*. Professor Rivers, who had devoted the best years of his life to perfecting his wonderful invention, struggling bravely on through innumerable disappointments and failures, undaunted by the sneers of those who scoffed, or the significant pity of his friends, was so overcome by his signal triumph that he fled from the congratulations of those who sought to do him honour, leaving to his young assistants the responsibility of restoring the marvellous craft to her berth in the great ship-house that had witnessed her construction.

These assistants were two lads, eighteen and nineteen years of age, who were not only the Professor's most promising pupils, but his firm friends and ardent admirers. The younger, Carlos West Moranza, was the only son of a Cuban sugar-planter, and an American mother who had died while he was still too young to remember her. From earliest childhood he had exhibited so great a taste for machinery that, when he was sixteen, his father had sent him

to the United States to be educated as a mechanical engineer in one of the best technical schools of that country.

There his dearest chum was his class-mate, Carl Baldwin, son of the famous American shipbuilder, John Baldwin, and heir to the latter's vast fortune. The elder Baldwin had founded the school in which his own son was now being educated, and placed at its head his life-long friend, Professor Alpheus Rivers, who, upon his patron's death, had also become Carl's sole guardian.

In appearance and disposition young Baldwin was the exact opposite of Carlos Moranza, and it was this as well as the similarity of their names that had first attracted the lads to each other. While the young Cuban was a handsome fellow, slight of figure, with a clear olive complexion, impulsive and rash almost to recklessness, the other was a typical Anglo-Saxon American, big, fair, and blue-eyed, rugged in feature, and slow to act, but clinging with bulldog tenacity to any idea or plan that met with his favour. He invariably addressed his chum as "West," while the latter generally called him "Carol."

The Rivers submarine boat, finally christened *Mermaid*, had been evolved during long years in the great Baldwin shipyard located on the Delaware, less than a mile distant from the Baldwin technical school, and during his lifetime John Baldwin had taken a deep interest in its construction. Thus Carl had been familiar with its every detail from the time that he could remember anything, and had grown up with an abiding faith in its possibilities. That his chum was also enthusiastic concerning it constituted one of the strongest bonds of sympathy between them. Now that its complete success had been demonstrated by four hours of trial, during most of which time it had been manœuvred under water with a party of six distinguished engineers on board, Carl's elation was only little less than that of the inventor, whose very life was bound up in it. Like him, however, the lad was slow to

express his deepest feelings ; but the enthusiasm of the day found ample vent through the young Cuban, who had been permitted to share in the glorious result, and who poured forth his exultation in a torrent of words as the two lads left the shipyard and wended their way homeward.

"It is the crowning triumph of the century, my Carol, and will make immortal the name of our honoured instructor. To have lived until this day and to be allowed a share in such glory is a vast privilege. Of war, what a revolution will be made ! Oh, if my poor country possessed but one of these marvels, how quickly would she be free ! To destroy the ships of Spain and open to the world every Cuban port ! What an achievement ! what honour ! Carol, why may it not be done ? Why may we not take this *Mermaid*, and with her liberate Cuba from her centuries of slavery ?"

"Because," answered Carl Baldwin slowly, "she is not ours to take, and even if she were, we would not be allowed to use her in any such fashion. The Government would not permit us."

"But if she were ours. If the Professor would consent to allow us to attempt the experiment. If we could escape the vigilance of the American cruisers, and manage to convey our marvel of marvels to the scene of action, would you not join in the enterprise, my Carol ? Would you not aid in striking the blow for freedom ?"

"It would certainly be most interesting to test the little craft in actual service," replied the young American cautiously.

"Interesting, say you ? It is of vital importance. What she has done is nothing. Who knows what she may accomplish ? When will there come another such chance for trying her in warfare ? Where in the world is there a prize to be gained equal in value to that of a free Cuba ? That my father has sacrificed all but life itself for her is my proudest boast ; that I may soon fight by his side, my

fondest hope. Oh, if you cold-blooded Americans could but witness the cruelty, the oppression, the despair, the horror of it all. But, if I cannot win over my dearest friend among them, how may I hope to persuade others? Ah, Dios! it is hard, it is bitter, it is pitiful, that but for want of a single helping hand all should be lost."

At this point the young Cuban's feelings so overpowered him that words failed to express them, and as Carl Baldwin's policy was to remain silent during these outbursts, the lads reached the school building in which they lodged without further conversation.

Since Carlos Moranza had left home, the affairs of his native land had come to a sorry pass. The struggle for freedom had begun. Spanish armies devastated the fair island, killing its inhabitants, laying waste their fields, and destroying their homes, while Spanish war-ships patrolled its coasts to cut off all outside aid from the insurgents.

The latter, devoid of nearly everything necessary for carrying on a war, save a desperate determination to resist to the death, occupied the interior of the island, where they found impregnable strongholds amid its rugged mountains and dense forests. The sympathies of the American people were with them, and expeditions for their relief were constantly fitting out in the southern ports of the United States. Many of these failed to reach their destination, since international law compelled the Government to prevent them from sailing, if possible. Thus, in addition to the Spanish fleet patrolling the Cuban coasts, the southern waters of the United States were guarded by an equally numerous fleet of American men-of-war and vessels of its revenue marine.

From the very outset of the war Don Cæsar Moranza, after placing his only daughter, Catina, who was two years younger than Carlos, in what he conceived to be a safe retreat, had linked his fortunes with those who fought for liberty. He had quickly risen to the command of a

Cuban army, and, as General Moranza, the dashing cavalry leader, proved such a terror to the Spaniards, that to capture him became an important object of their campaigns.

With all the impetuosity of his nature Carlos longed to take part in the glorious struggle, and, in every letter that he found means of transmitting to his father, pleaded to be allowed to join him. Thus far his petitions had been denied on the ground that he would still have ample opportunity for fighting after he had become a skilled engineer. In the meantime he could do much for the cause where he was, and must remember that to perfect himself in his chosen profession would be of greater value to Cuba than the winning of a battle. This stimulant was what made young Moranza one of the most brilliant scholars in the Baldwin Polytechnic ; for he felt that every problem solved was a blow struck for his country. At the time of the *Mermaid's* successful trial trip, in which the young Cuban had been allowed to participate as a distinguished reward of merit, he had received no word from his father or sister for many weeks, and so was filled with anxiety concerning them.

As the lads reached the school they separated, Carlos proceeding directly to his room, and the other going in search of Professor Rivers to report the safe housing of the *Mermaid*. The Professor was so buried in thought that for a few moments he apparently took no notice of Carl's entrance. Suddenly, lifting his head and looking squarely at the lad, he exclaimed—

"Yes, yes, my boy, all is well so far as we have gone, but what will she do in actual service? How will she behave in face of an enemy? Is she capable of single-handed and successful attack against a fleet? Until these questions are answered how may I know whether my life-work is a success or a failure? To solve them I would willingly engage a navy in single combat ; but where may I find one willing to accept my challenge?"

"Why not in Cuba, sir?" suggested Carl with a sudden inspiration.

"Cuba! Cuba!" repeated the Professor slowly, as though bewildered by the idea thus presented, and then he plunged once more into abstracted thought.

After waiting a few moments longer, and seeing that his guardian was disinclined for further conversation just then, Carl Baldwin departed to tell his friend of the seed he had planted. To his dismay he found Carlos standing as though petrified, and staring with bloodshot eyes at a telegram evidently just received.

"What is it, West? What has happened?" inquired young Baldwin anxiously.

"Read that," replied the other huskily.

With this he extended the message, which was signed by the president of the Cuban Junta or War Committee, whose headquarters were in New York City.

"General Moranza captured by treachery and shot by order of Weyler. His daughter seized, imprisoned, and held for transportation to a penal colony. May God help you in this hour of your affliction!"

"For my father's death I grieve not," cried the young Cuban. "He died for the cause he loved, and may be avenged. But for my sister, my own little Catina, in prison, at the mercy of those brutes, and consigned to the living death of a convict! How may I bear it? What can I do? Tell me, my friend, for I am going mad."

"No," cried Carl Baldwin, "you shall not go mad, nor even yield to despair, for we will yet save her. The Professor shall go with us, and we will take the *Mermaid*. Even now he is inclined to consider some such undertaking. And when he reads this message he will be as ready to set forth as you or I. Oh yes, my dear fellow, we can rescue her and we will. Instead of going to a penal colony, she shall come to this country, and be as free as you are at this moment."

As he spoke the young American seized his friend's hand, and the latter looking into the brave blue eyes, now blazing with excitement, believed that Catina would be saved.

CHAPTER II

THE submarine boat *Mermaid* was a cigar-shaped shell of aluminium bronze, extremely light and strong, about forty feet in length and eight in greatest diameter. On its upper side was a small railed platform or deck, from the centre of which rose a low turret provided with four bull's-eyes, from which an observer might glance out ahead, astern, or on either side. Another bull's-eye was fitted into the hinged and water-tight cap that closed the turret when the boat was submerged.

The interior of the boat was divided into three compartments. Of these, the one farthest forward was fitted with an air-lock, through which a person wearing a diver's suit might leave the vessel while she was under water and return to her at will. This hold was also pierced for a bull's-eye through which could be made to shine an electric search light of intense power.

The central compartment was the living and operating room. It also contained a dynamo, an air compressor, and a small condenser, by means of which sea-water could be made drinkable. In the after compartment was located a compact but powerful gasoline engine. This furnished the motive power for running on the surface, and also stored electricity by which the screw could be turned when surface air was no longer available. Beneath the floor of the central compartment was a tank for water ballast, which could be filled or emptied at will of the operator. In all parts of the boat were hundreds of tubes, wires, cocks, valves, and other devices of amazing ingenuity for ensuring the safety of her crew and the discomfiture of an enemy.

She was indeed, as Carlos Moranza had said, one of the crowning scientific marvels of the century. On the day succeeding that of her trial trip, the young Cuban was full of hope and courage, for Professor Rivers had been won to his cause by the enticing prospect of achieving the rescue of a young girl from a dreadful fate, and at the same time testing under most trying conditions the powers of his beloved boat. He had only stipulated that she should not be used for the destruction of either life or property.

Thus it happened that in less than a week one of the most powerful tugs on the Delaware cleared for Havana. She had in tow a great dumping scow, such as is used in New York harbour for conveying the city garbage far out to sea. This scow was built with a long central pocket, the bottom of which was longitudinally divided into two parts. Each of these was hung on massive hinges, and could be made to drop or open outward, thus allowing the contents of the pocket to fall into the sea. Then, by means of a donkey-engine, the great valves could be drawn up and closed as before.

The question of how to get the *Mermaid* to Havana had proved most puzzling. She was too small to undertake such a voyage by herself, and had she been shipped on the deck of another vessel, her every movement would have been watched and heralded, while the success of the proposed expedition depended upon its secrecy. Thus, at the very outset, the would-be rescuers seemed to be confronted by an insurmountable difficulty. Then Carl Baldwin had thought of the sea-going dumping scows, several of which had been built in his father's shipyard, where one recently completed even now awaited a purchaser.

"Why couldn't we take the *Mermaid* to Cuba in it?" he suggested, after several other plans had been dismissed as impracticable.

"The very thing," cried Carlos Moranza. "In that way we could carry her right into Havana harbour, and there offer the scow for sale to the Spaniards as a blind. It is a noble idea, my Carol, and will prove our salvation."

"It might be done," said the Professor thoughtfully. "Let us go and take some measurements."

This they did, and found that the pocket of the dumping scow was amply large to hold the *Mermaid*, at the same time allowing her free egress and exit. It would even float her when closed and half filled with water. Only a few alterations that readily suggested themselves to the Professor were needed to exactly suit the great craft to their purpose.

While he took charge of these, and Carlos took a trip to New York for consultation with the President of the Cuban Junta, Carl Baldwin arranged for the charter of the finest sea-going tug on the Delaware, and through her captain for the purchase of the dumping-scow.

The Professor had long since placed the practical direction of his school in the hands of able assistants, so that he was free to leave it at a moment's notice for any length of time. Thus, when he announced that he was about to devote a few weeks to the testing of his pet invention, and should need the assistance of his two ranking pupils, their departure was effected without arousing undue curiosity.

The clearing of the tug, with its novel tow, for Havana, was, however, quite another thing; and, from the moment their destination was announced, both craft were watched by Government officials and Spanish spies to see that no contraband cargo was taken aboard. Of course nothing of the kind was found; but this did not prevent a revenue cutter from escorting the tow down the river and across Delaware Bay until it was clear of the breakwater and well out at sea. Finally, the cutter turned back; but even

then her commander continued to watch the tow through a glass.

"In spite of their seeming innocence, I regard that as one of the most suspicious departures ever made from the Delaware," he remarked to a lieutenant who stood beside him. "The pretence of trying to sell that scow in Havana is only the baldest kind of a bluff. Any fool knows that those blooming Spaniards aren't going to put themselves to either the expense or trouble of carrying garbage out to sea so long as they can dump it in their harbours. Hello! What's that? Look quick and tell me if you don't see something between us and them."

Through the glass thrust into his hand, the lieutenant took a long and comprehensive survey of the intervening waters.

"No, sir, I don't see anything," he reported at length.

"Neither do I now," said the other after another look. "I would have sworn, though, that I saw something like a raft moving towards that scow."

The commander had indeed caught a glimpse of the *Mermaid* rising to the surface to get her bearings, but she had instantly dived, nor did she again visit the surface until safely within the shadow of the great scow.

She had run down the river the night before, and had lain behind the breakwater with only a small portion of her turret above the surface, until the tow, with its accompanying cutter, had passed out to sea. Then she followed, with her eyes just awash, and dove deep beneath the revenue vessel when it turned back. Upon next coming to the surface, she had been allowed to rise a little too far, and so was very nearly discovered.

"It was a close shave," admitted Carl Baldwin, after the *Mermaid* was safely ensconced within the closed pocket of the great scow; "but a safe miss is as good as a thousand miles, and now we are all right till we get to Havana."

"Don't you be too sure of that," admonished the captain of the tug gruffly. "There's many a cruiser between here and there, and every one of 'em is sartin to board us."

So it proved. At Charleston, where the tug put in for coal, leaving her tow in the lower bay, the scow was boarded by revenue officers, who did not leave her until she was again at sea; and all the while the poor little *Mermaid* was dodging about under water, only coming up now and then for a breath and a quick glance at her surroundings, like a hunted sea-fowl.

Off the mouth of the St. John's River, the tow was hove-to by a blank shot from a Government cruiser, and again was the *Mermaid* forced to seek safety at the bottom of the sea. This time she avenged herself by rising directly beneath the cruiser, and demonstrating to the Professor's entire satisfaction how easily he could if he chose place and fire a torpedo that would blow her from the water.

It had been decided to touch at Key West, the most southerly extremity of Florida, as well as of the United States, and only eighty-five miles across the Gulf Stream from Havana, and finally, after many narrow escapes from discovery, our adventurers reached the port of that quaint island-city in safety.

Here they found several American men-of-war, a small fleet of torpedo-boats, four revenue cutters, and a Spanish cruiser, to all of whom the strange tow, slowly making its way up the harbour, seemed an object of especial interest. Their fame had preceded them; every one knew that they were bound for Havana, and that they had been objects of suspicion all the way down the coast. So, before they came to anchor, they were boarded by United States officers, and a guard was placed on both tug and scow, with orders to allow no communication between them and the shore, except under strict surveillance.

In the meantime, the little *Mermaid* had sunk quietly

out of sight, nor did she again rise to the surface until safely beneath a wharf covered with freight sheds, that extended out to deep water. Here, hidden in deepest shadow, she lay unobserved until nightfall, when our lads found no difficulty in gaining the streets of the town, leaving the Professor in charge of his beloved boat.

As Carlos Moranza had visited Key West before, he led the way without hesitation amid throngs of promenaders, among whom white was the rarest colour to be seen. Coal-black negroes from Jamaica, sallow-complexioned Spaniards, swarthy Cubans, mulattoes, quadroons, octoroons, and creoles, with faces tinted in every shade of brown or yellow, jostled each other on the sidewalks, all talking, singing, or laughing, with eager gesticulations. Electric lights gleamed among the softly nestling leaves of tall cocoa-palms. Open carriages, bearing cigarette-smoking men in white linen, gaudily-clad negresses, or languid Cuban women, whose only sign of animation lay in their flashing eyes, rattled over the white pavements, while, above all, innumerable flags, displaying the blue and white stripes, the crimson field and single white star of Cuba Libre, fluttered in the faint night breeze.

The entire city, which is wholly Cuban in sympathy, as well as two-thirds so in population, was rejoicing over the news just received of an insurgent victory. The exulting throngs were most dense about the building occupied by an agent of the Cuban Junta, on a balcony of which the glad tidings were being read aloud from a paper just snatched off the press, while a guard stationed at the main entrance forbade admission, except to such persons as were of well-attested patriotism.

"Halt! You may not pass!" cried one of these, as our lads, having forced their way through the crowd, sought to enter.

For answer Carlos Moranza spoke a few words in so low a tone that only he might hear them.

“The strange tow, slowly making its way up
the harbour.”



Instantly the man stood aside, touched his cap respectfully, and motioned them to enter.

As they did so, a third person attempted to pass the guard in their company, but was seized on the threshold.

"Is this hombre of your party, señor?" asked the guard.

"Certainly not," replied Carlos. "I never saw him before."

So the intruder, who was evidently of Spanish blood, was ignominiously thrust back, and as he slunk away he muttered words that boded no good to Carlos Moranza, in case they should again meet.

In the meantime the young Cuban, accompanied by Carl Baldwin, made his way to the balcony where the agent of the Junta had just finished reading of Garcia's victory. As Carlos touched him on the shoulder he turned quickly and frowned at sight of a stranger. Again the lad whispered his magic formula, and in another moment the agent was embracing him with the fervour of a life-long friendship. Then he led his guests to a private room, where for half-an-hour he engaged Carlos in earnest conversation, of which young Baldwin could only understand an occasional word.

When our lads finally left the building and regained the street, the latter asked curiously, "What was it all about, old man?"

"He said," replied Carlos, "that the Spanish cruiser now in port is here for the express purpose of escorting us to Havana, and that, as soon as we are outside Key West harbour, she will place a guard on both tug and scow."

"Hm!" remarked Carl Baldwin reflectively; "we can't allow that."

"I should say not," agreed Carlos Moranza; "only I'd like to know how we are to prevent it."

"Just you leave it to me, and I'll show you the trick," rejoined the young American.

CHAPTER III

So intent were the lads upon their conversation, that they mistook another freight shed for the one beneath which the *Mermaid* was hidden, and walked a few paces beside it before discovering their error. When they did so, they at once began to retrace their steps, and in turning a corner of the building came plump upon a cloaked figure evidently on their trail.

"Hello! what do you mean, sir, by following us?" cried Carl Baldwin, seizing the stranger's arm as he spoke.

With a muttered oath the man wrenched himself free and darted away, but not before the gleam of a street light had revealed his features to Carlos Moranza.

"The very fellow who tried to force his way into the quarters of the Junta!" he exclaimed, "and more than likely a Spanish spy. It is a narrow escape, my Carol, for if our blunder had not forced us to turn back, he must have discovered the *Mermaid*. In that case we should indeed have met with trouble."

"Let us hasten, then, before he returns."

"I don't believe he will dare do that. He is too badly scared."

But the spy did return, and, crouching in deepest shadow, became convinced that those whose business he was so anxious to discover had passed beneath the wharf. As he dared not attempt to follow them through the impenetrable gloom into which they had disappeared, he sought a hiding-place, and from it watched with infinite patience for them to again come forth.

They had, in the meantime, safely regained the snug living-room of the *Mermaid*, and reported all that had happened, to the Professor. Then Carl Baldwin unfolded his scheme for delaying the Spanish cruiser in port until after their departure.

As a result, the submarine boat was allowed to drift down the harbour with the ebbing tide, until she came abreast the great black hull of a man-of-war. Then she imperceptibly sank beneath the surface.

The watch officer of the Spanish cruiser, leaning on her after-rail and gazing musingly down into the dark waters sweeping seaward, speculated idly concerning the stream of phosphorescent light tailing out from under her counter, but thought of it only as a natural phenomenon.



“She hovered like a gigantic fish.”

Had he known that it was caused by the motion of the *Mermaid's* propeller necessary to hold her in position against the stream while she hovered like a gigantic fish directly above the screw of his ship, how easily could he have won the promotion for which he longed. But he suspected nothing; and as Carl Baldwin, working from the diving chamber of the submarine craft, had succeeded in fastening one end of a short length of stout wire rope to the propeller blade, and shackling

the other to a ring-bolt in the massive rudder, the officer turned with a sigh and walked away.

On the following morning the Spanish spy, weary and cramped with his long vigil, was amazed to see an utter stranger emerge cautiously from beneath the wharf he had been watching, and walk quickly away. For a moment the spy was undecided as to whether he should follow this person or seek to discover where he had come from. Then choosing the former course, he followed Professor Rivers at a respectful distance, until he had the vast satisfaction of seeing him meet, near the custom-house, the captain of the tug that was avowedly bound for Havana.

There was a connection then between those who hid beneath the wharf and the suspected tow anchored in the harbour. Undoubtedly a store of contraband goods was concealed under the wharf, and an effort would be made to convey them on board the tug before she sailed. What a reward was in prospect for him could he but discover it!

A little later the spy, with two companions, all armed, occupied a skiff that made its way cautiously through the dark spaces beneath the wharf he had watched so long. Suddenly between them and the outer daylight two men appeared one after the other. Both slid down one of the piles supporting the pier and dropped into the water, or at least the exulting spy thought they did so as he hastily urged his boat in that direction.

To his amazement and disgust, when he reached the spot where they had disappeared, he could discover no trace of them. Neither was there a boat or a hiding-place into which they could have gone. The man was furious at being thus baffled, and uttered many a fierce Spanish oath. Finally, convinced that further search in that direction was fruitless, he pulled out into the harbour to watch the mysterious tow that still lay at anchor. As

he drew near to it he saw its captain come off from shore alone. Then the guard from one of the revenue cutters was withdrawn, anchors were lifted, and the tow began to move slowly down the channel. It was certain that no one save the captain had gone aboard, nor had any cargo been taken in except a few tons of carefully examined coal.

Never in his life had the spy been so puzzled and disappointed; but it was a slight consolation to know that Spain's vigilant cruiser would accompany the *Gringos* to Havana. Even now was the black-hulled warship preparing to follow the departing tow. As the massive anchor broke away from the bottom, her great screw began to churn the water, and she slowly forged ahead. Suddenly her screw ceased to act, she took a sheer in the wrong direction, there was a vast amount of confusion on her decks, and in another minute she was fast aground on a bank of the narrow channel. Every eye in Key West harbour was fixed upon her, and before any one again thought of the departing tow, it had gained the high seas, and was beyond the jurisdiction of either Spain or "Uncle Sam." A little later, with the saucy *Mermaid* safely hidden in the ample receptacle of the great dumping scow, the tow had vanished in the direction of Havana.

That night the spy boarded a swift passenger steamer bound for the same port, which at sunrise of the following morning passed beneath the frowning walls of Moro Castle in company with the tow he had come to watch.

The *Mermaid* retained her berth even after a pilot had boarded the tug, and her crew looked eagerly upon the wonderfully beautiful scene unfolding before them as they passed through a narrow entrance into the broad, land-locked harbour of Havana.

Carl Baldwin, to whom everything was excitingly novel, viewed with delight the grim Moro with its tall lighthouse tower, the white Cabanas fortress, the tinted,

flat-roofed buildings of the city across the placid basin, the quaint cathedral spires, and the thousand other curious features of Spain's chief stronghold in the New World.

Carlos Moranza, filled with conflicting emotions at again approaching his native land under such strange conditions, gazed in silence, but as though hoping with the very intensity of his vision to pierce the crowding walls and discover the prison of his beloved sister.

Professor Rivers had eyes only for the warships, of which the harbour held half-a-dozen, as he speculated upon the ease with which his little *Mermaid* could humble their pride and render them powerless.

At this very moment the Spanish spy was regarding, and triumphantly recognising, all three of the Americans through a glass levelled at them from the deck of the steamer on which he was a passenger. Thus it happened that, as the captain of the tug was preparing to go ashore and make formal entry at the custom-house, after having successfully passed examination by both health officers and port authorities, two barges filled with soldiers dashed out from the mole and headed directly towards the new arrivals. One of these took possession of the tug, while the other, in which sat the exulting spy, ranged alongside the dumping scow.

For nearly an hour the soldiers searched every compartment and corner of the two vessels, even overhauling the coal in the tug's bunkers. When there was no longer an unexplored crevice, even the spy was forced to confess that there was no person aboard unaccounted for in the tug's papers, and that he must have laboured under a delusion as to what he had seen. He was bewildered, mortified, and angry, and was rendered furious by the ridicule heaped upon him by the officer to whom he was obliged to report his failure to discover anything that would justify a seizure of the tug.

This craft the Spaniards would have been glad to

possess, but when its captain went ashore and announced his desire to dispose of the dumping scow, the authorities only laughed at him, and referred him to General Weyler, who happened at that time to be absent with an expedition to the interior. This was gratifying information, as it afforded an excuse for remaining in Havana harbour until he should return.

In the meantime the *Mermaid*, having sunk out of sight on the approach of danger, had found safe refuge under the stern of a Spanish man-of-war that was moored close at hand. Here she received a supply of fresh air through a flexible tube, one end of which was supported on the surface of the water by a small float. During the time that her occupants were thus compelled to remain in hiding, they amused themselves by so wedging the rudder of the warship as to render it immovable.

With the earliest twilight of that evening they returned to the tug and held a short consultation with her captain, who had used his eyes to such good purpose while on shore that he was enabled to direct them to a place from which he believed they could gain the city streets. This was most important, for though in the darkness they might have landed anywhere along the quay, they would still have been shut off from the streets by a tall and stout iron fence, the gates of which were always guarded, and at sunset locked for the night. This is in accordance with a regulation that not only forbids any vessel to enter or leave the port of Havana between sunset and sunrise, but also prohibits all communication between the city and its harbour during the night.

The place indicated by the captain was a dock in which lay a number of fishing craft, and the entrance to which was closed by iron gates. As it was not likely that these extended very far below the surface, it was possible that the *Mermaid* might pass beneath them. This proved to be the case; for when, after a long search and several

narrow escapes from discovery, the dock was reached, the *Mermaid* managed to squeeze under the barrier, and when she next rose to the surface she was inside the city lines. Here she remained with her deck just awash, and in charge of the Professor, while the two lads, filled with hopeful excitement, set forth in search of information that should guide their future action.

CHAPTER IV

THE part of the city in which our lads found themselves was dark and deserted, save for an occasional soldier pacing a lonely beat and a few slouching figures that seemed trying to avoid observation. At the suggestion of Carlos they kept the middle of the ill-paved streets, for in Havana no one uses the narrow side-walks at night. To do so would be to invite a knife-thrust from the first dark *pasadizo*. Even in the more open spaces that they sought, each lad kept a hand in the pocket containing his revolver, and they took care not to allow any person to approach them closely from behind.

At length they came to a region of plazas and lighted thoroughfares, in which they encountered ever-increasing numbers of beggars and soldiers. The former were pitiable objects, horribly emaciated by the starvation which Spain was deliberately inflicting on her rebellious subjects, while most of the soldiers were mere boys, ill-fed, poorly clad, and wasted by sickness, but well armed and insolent to all save their own officers. These latter, who swaggered by in noisy, cigarette-smoking groups, seemed the only well-fed persons in the city, as well as the only ones who still found life worth the living. They stared impudently at our lads, and more than one, recognising Carl Baldwin as an American, treated him to insulting epithets, most of which he fortunately failed to understand.

Not knowing whom they might question, or even address with safety, the young adventurers finally turned into the brilliantly-lighted café of the Pasaje, where they hoped to gain some guiding clew from chance bits of conversation. The place was so crowded that for several minutes they failed to find vacant seats at any of the little tables scattered about the floor. At length they secured two that had just been vacated, and slipped into them. Two other seats at the same table were occupied by a supercilious-looking Spanish officer and a fashionably-attired civilian. The former, with an expression of deepest hatred cast toward Carl Baldwin, slowly rose, reversed his chair with a loud scraping on the marble pavement that attracted general attention, and reseated himself with his back turned squarely toward the young American. The latter had suspected the nature of the insulting epithets applied to him in the streets, but had been unable to reply to them on account of his limited knowledge of Spanish. With enforced silence his anger had smouldered until now, when it broke into a sudden fierce heat. Acting upon the impulse of the moment, he lifted his own chair, planted it in front of the Spaniard, deliberately reoccupied it, and stared his enemy full in the face, but without uttering a word.

As Carlos Moranza realised his companion's intention, he started towards him, but was detained by the fourth man who had been seated at the table, and who whispered hurriedly—

“Fly for your life, amigo, while there is yet time. For a Moranza to be arrested in Havana means sure and speedy death.”

“But I cannot leave my friend,” gasped the young Cuban, bewildered at being thus promptly recognised where he believed himself to be unknown.

“He will only suffer imprisonment. They dare not kill him. His Government is too powerful.”

For a moment Carlos Moranza hesitated. Then his resolution was taken.

"I cannot desert him," he cried; and, gaining the place where Carl Baldwin sat, he grasped his arm with the intention of dragging him from the café. At this, the officer, who had cowered irresolute beneath his adversary's unflinching gaze, clapped a hand to his sword and attempted to rise. In an instant the young American had thrust him back with such force that the frail chair crashed beneath him, and the uniform of Spain was rolled ignominiously in the dust.

Then, without regarding the man further, or noticing the other inmates of the café, who were thronging towards them, Carl turned to his friend, saying—

"I don't think I like this place, West. Isn't there some other in which we might be just as happy?"

"Yes, yes, come quick," replied Carlos, starting towards the street as he spoke; but it was too late, for at that moment a file of soldiers appeared in the doorway. They were led by the Spanish spy who had followed our friends from Key West, and who had been sitting in the Café Pasaje brooding over the futility of his attempts to apprehend them when the two lads unsuspectingly entered it.

"There they are! Seize them!" he now cried exultingly, and the obedient soldiers rushed forward.

With all the latent fury of his nature aroused and blazing from his blue eyes, the young Anglo-Saxon American fought single-handed the minions of Spain. Two of them fell like logs beneath crashing blows from his fists. Two more were hurled breathless to right and left. The others hesitated, and even shrunk before him as with a cry of "Come on, West!" he dashed toward the doorway. At that moment some one flung a chair before him. He tripped over it, staggered wildly, and then measured his length on the pavement with half-a-dozen Spanish soldiers on his back.

When next he was allowed to regain his feet, he was helplessly bound and being marched away to prison, together with Carlos Moranza, who was in the same unhappy plight. Even then the spirit of the young American was unsubdued ; and, in defiance of his enemies, he raised a cry on gaining the street that he felt certain was as good Spanish as it was English.

"Cock-a-doodle-doo !" he shouted, with all the breath left in him.

"Silencio, Gringo !" growled the nearest soldier, at the same time striking his prisoner full in the mouth with the flat of his hand.

For a wonder, Carl Baldwin retained sufficient wisdom to accept the blow without a word, though, had he known the full value of his outcry, he might have been tempted to repeat it.

A crowd had already gathered in front of the café, and from it instantly arose answering shouts, in tones indicating both derision and amazement, of "El gallo ! El canto del gallo !"

Carlos Moranza wondered how his friend had obtained a knowledge of the Junta's defiant password for the current month, since even to him it had only been revealed under promise of a strict secrecy that he had not broken. He had used it but once, and then the whispered "Canto del gallo" had instantly admitted him to the presence of the Junta's agent in Key West. No matter, though, how Carl had discovered it, he was justified in using it under the circumstances, for it might raise friends to their assistance, if, indeed, there were any within hearing who understood its hidden meaning. Thus thinking, the young Cuban also uplifted his voice in a ringing "Canto del gallo."

At sound of this second note of defiance, the Spanish spy, with a malediction upon the *gallipollo*, sprang towards the lad, but, ere he could strike a blow, some one in the crowd hurled a paving-stone that stretched him senseless

on the ground. As though this were a signal, the mob, led by a tall man in the dress of a *carbonero* or charcoal-burner, rushed upon the slender file of soldiers, and swept it irresistibly before them.

A few moments of pandemonium—shots, yells, screams of pain, cries of exultation, a crash of flying missiles, the ominous clatter of a cavalry patrol galloping down the street, and then all was over. The mob melted away like a puff of smoke, leaving only a few innocent and in-offensive citizens to be cut down by the sabres of the troopers. The prisoners who had caused the outbreak had also disappeared, and when the Spanish spy, slowly regaining his senses, became aware of this fact, he gnashed his teeth with rage.

Our lads were in the meantime dragged at top speed through a labyrinth of narrow streets and dark alleys, until, breathless and bewildered, they finally found themselves in a dimly-lighted room, surrounded by a group of those who had effected their release. One of these severed the cords binding their arms with two blows of a dirk-like machete, and said in reassuring tones—

“Fear nothing, señors ; you are with friends, sworn to aid all who suffer in the cause of Cuba. Tell us, then, who you are, whence you come, and how it happens that you possess the most secret password of the Junta.”

“I,” replied the young Cuban boldly, for to him alone of the two was this address intelligible, “am Carlos Moranza, son of——”

Here the lad was interrupted by a great cry from one of his auditors, and in another instant he was folded in a close embrace by the *carbonero* who had led the mob to the rescue.

“Carlos, my son ! my own brave boy ! do you not know your father ?” cried the man, half-sobbing, half-laughing in the excitement of his discovery.

“Father ! my father ! can it be ?” screamed Carlos,

staring wildly at the man. "It is indeed his voice ; but without hearing it I should never have known him. But, father, they told me you were shot, and I have mourned you as dead."

"I was indeed captured and condemned to be shot, but managed to escape," replied General Moranza. "And I should have joined you in the land of freedom ere this, but for Catina."

"What of her ?" inquired the young Cuban eagerly. "Is she still alive and well ? I heard that she was a prisoner, condemned to Africa, and am here to effect her release, if it be not too late."

"The child is indeed an inmate of the vile *Jacoba*, and sentenced to transportation in a ship that will sail on the morrow," replied the General. "This I learned but an hour since from Don Estevan."

"Now I know," interrupted Carlos. "It was also he who gave me warning in the café."

"'Twas to meet him, who is a true friend of the cause," continued the other, "that I lingered near the Pasaje, and so was on hand to rescue from Weyler's clutches those who appealed for aid with the password of the Junta."

"Yes," laughed Carlos, "the 'Canto del gallo' of my friend, who yet declares that he knew nothing of its secret value, did us a fine service ; but of Catina, my father, what more have you to tell ?"

"Nothing, my son ; all efforts to rescue her have been made in vain, and on the morrow the little one will sail away for ever. I have lacked two things—a demonstration of sufficient magnitude to attract attention from the prisons, and the means of conveying her from the island undiscovered. But alas——"

"Both of them I can supply," cried Carlos eagerly. "Such a demonstration may be contrived as will cause every Spaniard in Havana to tremble in his shoes and call

on the saints for protection. As for a conveyance, it is already at hand. Furthermore, the transport ship can certainly be prevented from sailing on the morrow, and shall be."

"What then, my Carlos? Have the United States espoused our cause and sent a fleet to our aid?"

"Not so, father, only two of her brave citizens, of whom this, my dearest friend, is one, have come with me; but we have brought that which may accomplish all that I claim and more. Do not question me as to its nature, for I am bound to present secrecy. Only be prepared for our demonstration which will be made to-morrow night; effect the release of the little one from *La Jacoba*, bring her to the dock of the fishmarket on the exact stroke of midnight, and her safety together with thy own shall be assured."

After another hour spent in joyful congratulations, explanations, and a perfecting of details for the proposed rescue, our lads took their departure, and cautiously returned to the place where Professor Rivers anxiously awaited them.

CHAPTER V

ALTHOUGH amid the excitements of the night Carl and Carlos had not realised the flight of time, the hours of waiting passed by their companion in anxious suspense on board the *Mermaid* had seemed interminable. He had not dared desert his boat for a minute, nor would it have been safe to move from the precise position in which the lads had left her. So he could only watch from the turret of his submerged craft, with every sense keenly alert for the return of his young friends. After a while he seemed to hear guarded footsteps and whispering voices close at hand, though unable to see the figures to which they belonged. The impulse to turn on a

search light and thus discover the nature of his surroundings became so strong that at length he disconnected the wires in order to remove the temptation.

He had hardly done this and resumed his position in the turret, when there came a shout, a shot, and a rush of feet. Then a cry in English of—

“Show a light, Professor; a light—quick!”

The startled man struck a match and held it aloft, where it was instantly extinguished by a little puff of wind.



“Then two dripping figures scrambled aboard.”

But its purpose was served, for even as it expired two dark forms leaped into the black water that closed above them. At the same moment half-a-dozen shots rang out spitefully, and one of them, evidently attracted by the Professor's light, glanced from the *Mermaid's* iron turret. Then two dripping figures scrambled aboard, the turret hatch was closed, and, with her crew safely reunited, the marvellous craft sank beneath the surface, without leaving a trace to be discovered by the flashing lanterns that, a

few minutes later, were exploring every inch of the dock in which she had lain.

The lads had made a second narrow escape, and that they had made it at all was not due to any lack of precaution on the part of the Spanish spy, who, fully convinced that they were in some way connected with the mysterious tow in the harbour, had taken every means to intercept them in case they should attempt to regain it from the water-front of the city.

Daylight was tinting the eastern sky when the *Mermaid* again cautiously showed her eyes above the surface in close proximity to her tow, and, in obedience to a safety signal from the captain of the tug, who had long been watching for her, quickly regained her old position within the capacious pocket of the dumping scow. In the meantime the lads had recounted their adventures and told of their joyful meeting with General Moranza, together with what Carlos had promised should be done on the following night.

To all of this the Professor gladly agreed; for would it not afford him the longed-for opportunity of testing the powers of his beloved boat to the utmost? Thus, even before regaining her berth in the scow, the *Mermaid* paid a submarine visit to the Spanish transport that was to have borne many a heart-broken exile away from Cuba that day, and so tampered with propeller and steering-gear that her date of sailing was certain to be indefinitely postponed. A few hours later our adventurers watched with intense interest the consternation and bewilderment manifest on board the transport, and, when it became evident that she could not be moved, began to make active preparations for the coming night.

On the part of the Professor these consisted in mixing certain chemicals that required the utmost delicacy and skill in handling. Carl Baldwin devoted himself to so arranging a number of giant dynamite crackers, that they

might be ignited under water and made to explode on reaching the surface, while Carlos spent his time in carrying out a design that he had borne in mind ever since the planning of their expedition. It was the preparing for service of two Cuban flags. One was a transparency fitted with electric wires and made fast to a float that would support it on the surface of the water. This was intended only for night use, while the other, which was of silk with a slender staff of steel, was designed to attract attention by daylight.



"The explosion, close under their bows, of a giant fire-cracker."

Shortly before sunset, with everything in readiness for her great venture, the *Mermaid* forsook her snug berth and began to move across the harbour, with the eyes of her turret just awash and the flag of free Cuba fluttering bravely a foot above the surface of the water. It did not attract attention until it passed slowly within a hundred yards of the Spanish battle-ship *Alfonso XIX.*, when a clamour of voices from her decks announced its discovery.

A few minutes later a boat, manned by Spanish blue-jackets and commanded by a dapper lieutenant, dashed forth in pursuit of the hated emblem. It was easily overtaken and the officer stretched forth a hand to seize it. As he touched its steel staff he received an electric shock that caused him to utter a scream of terror and fall like one paralysed in the bottom of his boat. With this the little flag, proudly displaying its broad stripes of white and blue and a single white star in a crimson field, danced away over the placid waters towards another great ship flying the red and yellow ensign of Spain. Again was the bait taken, and a second boat was sent in pursuit. This time not only was the man who attempted to seize the Cuban emblem numbed as though by a stroke of lightning, but the boat's crew was thrown into a state of wildest panic by the explosion, close under their bows, of a giant fire-cracker.

"Isn't it great fun?" cried Carl Baldwin, who was in charge of the diving-room, the ventilation, and the explosives.

"It is bewildering," answered the Professor, without taking his eyes from the pressure-gauge that indicated their exact distance below the surface. "At this moment we three are demonstrating the worthlessness, as fighting machines, of the world's navies. From this time on, the nations of the earth will be compelled by fear to live at peace with each other."

"I wish we could sink just one Spanish ship," said Carlos Moranza from the engine-room.

"Of course we could do it," replied Professor Rivers. "In fact, we could within one hour's time destroy every warship in this harbour, but it would be a wicked and cowardly act. No, no, my boy, we will not harm a single human being in this glorious experiment. At the same time I am perfectly willing to inspire them with a wholesome fear."

"Just scare 'em stiff," laughed Carl Baldwin.

By the time darkness had settled over the scene the entire Spanish fleet was fully aroused. News of the mysterious happenings in the harbour had even spread to all



"The *Alfonso XIX*, lay in a glow of diffused light that seemed to come from beneath her very keel."

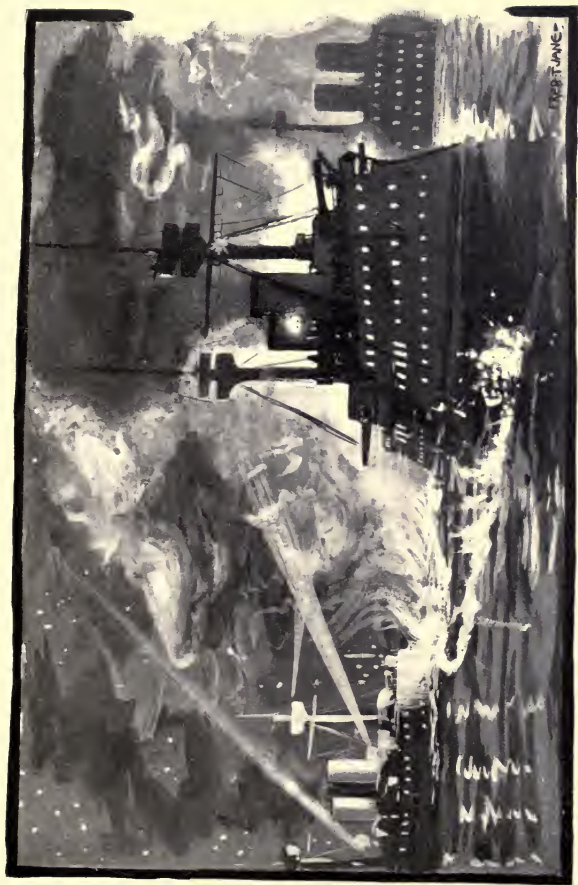
parts of the city, and General Moranza realised that his powerful friends were already at work.

Some two hours later, while the officers and crew of the *Alfonso XIX*, were still discussing with bated breath the recent supernatural appearance of the Cuban emblem, they were startled by again seeing it floating on the sur-

face but a short distance from them. This time, instead of being a simple silken flag, it was outlined in flames of red white and blue. There was a confused shouting of orders, and then the rattling fire of a machine-gun began to tear through the water just beyond the blazing emblem. With the first sound of firing it vanished, but a minute later the *Alfonso XIX.* lay in a glow of diffused light that seemed to come from beneath her very keel. And so it did, for that was the point from which the *Mermaid* was just then operating her 4000 candle-power search-light.

As the Spaniards waited in breathless terror for what should happen next, and fully expecting to be hurled into eternity by some tremendous explosion, a dense volume of sickening smoke rose slowly from the water on both sides of the ship, until she was completely enveloped in its suffocating folds. In a vain effort to escape this terror against which they could not fight, the Spaniards slipped their moorings with the idea of steaming out to sea, but, to their dismay, the great screw, that should have driven them through the water at a speed of twenty miles an hour, refused to move, and the vast bulk of the *Alfonso XIX.* only drifted helplessly.

Now the fiery emblem of free Cuba was again seen moving swiftly from point to point, fired at by ship after ship, disappearing with each shot only to flash out again a moment later in some unexpected quarter. Its erratic course was marked by eddying clouds of pungent smoke, bursts of flame, and loud explosions that threw the whole harbour into an uproar of terror. The panic-stricken ships of Spain dropped their moorings and made desperate efforts to escape from the enemy that they could neither see nor fight, but which seemed to hold them at its mercy. Some of them could not move, others could not be steered, and all drifted helplessly, colliding with one another, running aground, blinding each other with flashing search-lights that incessantly swept the black waters



“Threw the whole harbour into an uproar of terror.”

in every direction, and filled with terrified men who implored the saints to save them.

Nor was the alarm confined to these, but it spread to the city, where in every quarter church-bells rang madly, drums sounded their quick call to arms, trumpets blared, masses of people poured through every avenue leading to the water-front, and Havana was dominated by such a reign of terror as its history had never known. While the confusion was at its height, a heavy firing from the south announced an insurgent attack, and, with the general call for troops that followed, even the military guards of the prisons were temporarily pressed into service.

At five minutes before midnight, as marked by Carlos Moranza's watch, the cause of all this turmoil slipped unnoticed into the dock of the fishmarket, and lay motionless with only her low turret rising above the surface. At exactly midnight the young Cuban closed his watch with a snap, and listened eagerly to a rapidly approaching rattle of wheels. Then a carriage dashed through the crowds lining the water-front, and staring like so many bewildered moths at the flashing search-lights of the warships. As it drew up sharply at the head of the dock, a man in the uniform of a Spanish general leaped from it, and was quickly followed by a slender youth, apparently a mere boy, also in uniform.

At this moment the whole scene was suddenly illumined by a glare of light that seemed to come from the very waters of the dock, and a great cry rose from the spectators as they fell back in affright. Only two men dared press forward—the Spanish general and his aide. These stood for a moment on the very edge of the stone coping. Then the lad seemed to slip down into the water. As he disappeared, the general, waving his plumed chapeau high above his head, uttered a loud cry of "*Viva Cuba libre!*" and sprang after his companion.

Half-an-hour later the little *Mermaid* was slipping

swiftly but unseen beneath the very walls of Moro Castle and out of Havana harbour. In her tiny cabin, Catina Moranza, weak with reaction from the terrible strain of the past few days, lay sobbing in her brother's arms, and striving to tell of her blessed deliverance from the horrors of *La Jacoba*. At the same time General Moranza stood beside Professor Rivers and watched with wondering admiration his conning of the most powerful battle-ship the world had ever known.

Two miles out at sea they found their tug, that, with its tow, had taken advantage of the dire confusion in Havana harbour to leave it unnoticed. Here the *Mermaid* took the last dive of her eventful cruise, and in another minute was once more safely ensconced within the dumping scow.

Ten days later the clumsy tow, with the real object of its long voyage still unsuspected, moved slowly up the Delaware River, and came to anchor off the Baldwin ship-yard.

In answer to the chaff of such acquaintances as rallied him on the folly of trying to sell a dumping scow to the Spaniards of Havana, the captain of the tug was wont to say, "Yes, it is true I failed to sell the scow, but I made five thousand dollars out of the trip all the same."

Professor Rivers is equally satisfied with the success of his venture, and so of course is Carlos Moranza. As for Carl Baldwin, he made the home voyage in a state of delightful bewilderment.

"Why didn't you tell me, West, that your sister, instead of being a mere child, as I was led to suppose, was the very loveliest and most beautiful girl in the world?" he asked of his friend after his introduction to Catina.

"Because," answered Carlos Moranza, who had heretofore only seen the young lady in question through the eyes of a brother, "I didn't know she was."

THE
VENTURE OF THE "BERTHA" WHALER
A STORY OF THE ANTARCTIC

BY HENRY FRITH

*Author of "The Search for the 'Talisman,'" "Jack o' Lanthorn,"
"The Opal Mountain," &c. &c.*

I

"PAX!" cried Arthur Rushton, as he and his brother Reginald struggled amicably on the sofa in the vessel's berth.

"All right!" assented the elder, a fine lad of sixteen.

"How are you feeling this morning, Arthur? Better?"

"Rather! I feel like Samson already," replied the somewhat delicate-looking boy. "I am ready for several Philistines this morning, and mean to ask the steward-fellow for a couple of asses' jaw-bones for dumb-bell practice!"

"Better keep them shut, and not exercise them so much," said Reginald politely. "No, no!" he cried, as Arthur made an attempt to assault him. "It's pax now; and, besides, I want to finish dressing."

The threatened contest was thus averted, and, after some light chaff had been exchanged, the lads resumed their conversation.

"I wonder how things are at home," mused Arthur.

"The dear mother was very unwilling to let us go, though the step-pater did not seem to care! Poor, dear mother! I think she spoke to the captain about us, Reggie."

"I am sure she induced Mr. Halbrake to come with us instead of the other man from the firm. Halbrake, being a doctor (surgeon, I mean), is in the right place, particularly as the captain is a bit 'touchy' and obstinate. The mate is simply a beast."

"Yes; he and the master had a nice row over that paper which was found in the chart-room, or in the cabin above. The old skipper declared it was a warning. Didn't he get riled, too? and he nearly blew himself up as well as the mate."

"Next time he'll have a fit. It strikes me the mate aggravates him purposely. The captain can't stand any kind of interference. Well, I'm going on deck. Hurry up now," said Reginald.

This conversation took place in the lads' berth on board the *Bertha*, a sturdy barque in which they were voyaging. She was fitted as a "whaler," and belonged to the firm of Boscombe & Halbrake—chiefly Boscombe. The senior partner was the step-father of the Rushtons, for their mother, a rich widow, had married Mr. Boscombe, a gentleman whom the lads most cordially disliked. Shortly after the marriage he, at first gently, and later very firmly, had suggested a voyage for Arthur, who seemed delicate. Then he decided upon sending the *Bertha* to seal in the Antarctic, and to search for a missing vessel, the *Gladiator*. When this was arranged, Reginald volunteered to accompany his brother. Mr. Boscombe made no objection. Mr. Halbrake, a young surgeon, usually called "Doctor," also embarked under the old and experienced master, Blake, an eccentric, touchy man, obstinate to a degree, and always easily "drawn" when his attainments were questioned. He and his mate, Esau Cordell, were always at loggerheads. It seemed, as Reginald

Rushton had said, that Esau had aggravated the old man on purpose.

Several days had already passed since the *Bertha* quitted Plymouth. She had plunged and rolled in Biscay's Bay, and flung waves over her head aft to the waist. The lads and the Doctor lay close, sometimes venturing on deck, but more frequently keeping below till the weather moderated. The auxiliary screw was now hushed, and the barque plunged on under sail with a fine breeze on the quarter. On the day on which our tale opens, Reginald again went on deck, and the master asked him and Arthur to breakfast with him in his own cabin.

"Glad to see you up again," said the captain. "Began to think you intended to stay below until we reached the tropics. Got your sea-legs, eh? and a good appetite, I hope?"

The boys replied cheerfully in the affirmative, and the meal proceeded until, about ten minutes later, Mr. Cordell intruded his red head into the cabin and said—

"Excuse me, sir, but the weather is looking ugly. I think you had better shorten sail."

"I shall shorten sail when I please," replied the master. "You may take a reef in your jaw-tackle, Mr. Cordell, meantime."

"Best get up steam," continued the mate, without taking any notice of the suggestion.

"Get out, sir," roared the captain. "I am master of this ship! Say, what do you know of the paper about traitors aboard? Mind your own business, sir. I'll mind mine."

"There are obstinate old fools aboard, I suspect," muttered the mate. "The ship will be struck by a squall presently. You had better shorten sail, as I tell you."

"I shall not. Go forward, or I'll put you in irons. What impudence!" puffed the captain as the mate disappeared. "He thinks he commands the ship. Hum!"

he muttered after a pause, during which he had consulted the barometer, "it's falling fast, but *he* doesn't know the ropes," continued the obstinate skipper. "Now, lads, fire away; there's no trouble; eat hearty."

"We have finished, thank you, captain. The sky is getting very dark, sir."

"Eh! eh! a bit dusky. Seems the sea is rising; wind's changing too; must go and look at it," said the old fellow, as he sauntered out of the cabin. But hardly had he emerged on deck when the mate's voice rung out loudly—

"All hands take in sail; look alive there!"

The master swore, and rushed out to confront his deputy.

"Let her go as she is, Jackson," he cried to the steersman. "Go below forward," he shouted to the mate furiously. "I shall have you in limbo. Stevens" (he hailed the second mate), "stand by the watch and reduce sail. Heavens! here's the squall ahead! Let the sheets fly—smart. Up with the helm—hard up! Haul up the mainsail, down flying jib there!"

The men, fortunately, were prepared, and the mate, ignoring the threat of arrest, assisted, gave orders, and generally behaved well. The barque, taken aback, plunged, shook herself, and then fell off, careening to the blast, almost dipping her yard-arms into the sea. The captain raved; the mate shouted; the men laboured; and when the barque was brought before the gale under a furled topsail and furled foresail, the angry captain called the mate, and standing in the waist, addressed him as follows:—

"You are a mutineer, sir; you shall leave this ship. I will put into port as soon as possible and try you. Go below, sir!"

"You'll do nothing of the kind," retorted the mate; "perhaps I can break you. You had better knock under."

"Mutiny, by heavens! Mr. Stevens, send the watch aft to seize this fellow."

The captain seized the mate as he spoke. The latter resisted. A struggle ensued, in the quick course of which the older man was pinned against the bulwarks, while the vessel rolled deeply. A tremendous wave washed into the waist furiously, and then, no one knew how, the captain, overbalanced, dropped overboard, and disappeared in the raging sea. The mate had hardly saved himself, as the



"The captain, overbalanced, dropped overboard, and disappeared in the raging sea."

wave, which had nearly swamped the *Bertha*, rushed in cascades along the decks, and finally escaped impetuously by the scuppers.

"Man overboard!" was the cry, as the mate fell back on the deck. "Down helm; make ready the quarter boat!"

In a moment all was confusion. The hands were almost paralysed by the occurrence. Mr. Halbrake, who

had been below with the two youthful passengers, came hurriedly upon deck, and for a moment the *Bertha* was left to herself. She plunged and rolled deeply ; the waves dashed wildly over her, as the high cross seas invaded the decks fore and aft. For half a minute she appeared settling down, but her stability asserted itself, and she rolled back again, when the men steadied her by the helm on her course.

All thought of saving the unfortunate master was by this time abandoned ; he must have sunk immediately. The men went about their avocations in silence. The doctor assisted the mate, who had fallen and cut his head rather badly, and interrogated him closely.

But Mr. Halbrake found himself powerless in the matter of discipline. Though so closely connected with one of the owners, he found he had no authority. The mate had had his orders from Mr. Boscombe apparently, and the three passengers were impotent in the matter. They subsequently discussed the case, for the surgeon had had his suspicions ever since the mysterious paper had been found in the captain's room, but the author of it, and the accomplice who placed it there, were unknown. The mate himself had been as furious as the captain on the subject, possibly for different reasons, but the ill-feeling then engendered had caused the tragedy which all hands regretted.

The mate took command of the barque with the tacit approval of all, though evidently against the wishes of some on board. The squall abated almost as suddenly as it had arisen. Steam was raised, and the *Bertha* then resumed her course in a calmer sea. The lads took the opportunity to examine the ship, and inspected the oil-tanks, the harpoon-chests, the store-cabins, and penetrated to the forecastle. They made friends with the men, and learned many things about sealing and whaling. They

were much surprised at the strength of the ship—her strong hull, thick bulwarks, and clamped bows; the arm-chest and the stores, ammunition, food, were also inspected, and sampled later.

The voyage proceeded without any marked incidents. Then another, and yet another, storm attacked them. The *Bertha* put into no port; she proceeded southward with ever-varying weather, and novel experiences for her passengers. So the parallels were traversed to the Trades, and the Line was approached.

II

DAY after day passed. The last storm from the north-west had at length subsided. The weather was becoming very warm; the sailors donned straw hats, or other light head-gear, and thin garments. The decks were scorching. The wind fell entirely; and one day late in October, when in a sailing barque people would have been whistling for wind, the *Bertha* fell in with the north-east Trades, sail-shifting ceased, and the engine was at rest.

All this time there was much dissatisfaction in the minds of the three passengers. Esau Cordell's manner was not in his favour. The boys disliked him heartily, and even the young surgeon was prejudiced against the new commander. The three friends kept together, and frequently compared notes on their experiences and feelings.

"I cannot understand why your step-father sent you fellows aboard this ship," remarked the doctor. They were lying on the hot deck, beneath the shade of the quarter boat suspended in-board. "Why couldn't he have sent Arthur to the Mediterranean if he is delicate, though I don't admit that?"

"For money reasons," replied Reginald. "The 'boss' is as stingy as a tom-cat, and he gets the jaunt *gratis*."

"Stingy! I believe you," said Arthur. "He declares he is as poor as a church-mouse; and mice would be poor indeed if they depended upon his offertory."

"Ah, then perhaps he had some other motive," murmured the doctor. "However," he continued aloud, "you will both go home well and fit. Reggie may still go to Cambridge, and you, Arthur, may go as you please; perhaps try the Bar, as you have private means."

"We shall see," said Arthur quietly. "But I say, doctor, somehow I can't forget that letter about the 'traitors on board.' What was it all about, I wonder? The poor old captain was enraged, but he had something to go upon, I think."

"What became of the paper?" asked Reginald. "Has the mate got it?"

"Don't know. I suspect it has been picked up somewhere," replied the doctor. "There is nothing suspicious now, at any rate."

"Isn't there?" said Arthur, nodding significantly at the last speaker. "The mate came into our berth last night very quietly, and when he saw I was awake, he mumbled something and went out."

"Why didn't you tell me?" asked Reginald. "I thought we had fastened the door."

"Perhaps you heard some one in the passage close by," said Mr. Halbrake, "or perhaps you dreamt it all."

"No, I saw the man plainly in the dim light—it must have been early in the morning, I expect—and that *beast* Esau——"

"Meaning me, young sir? Go on! Don't mind my feelings," continued the mate sarcastically; "I am only a beast, you know!"

The three chums were perfectly dumfounded, the man had come upon them so silently and so cautiously. What had he heard?

"We are sorry that you happened to hear my young

friend's opinion," said Mr. Halbrake after a pause. "He seems, however, to have some objection to you. Of course I do not understand it, but——"

"But *I* understand that the accredited surgeon of this vessel, and a partner, I believe, of the owners, is inciting my passengers to insult the commander. The late skipper found out what that meant when he attacked me, and if



"Hullo, my young spitfire ! so you want a lesson, do you ?"

you and these cubs are not careful, you may all find yourselves in limbo."

"Cubs !" exclaimed Reginald. "What do you mean by such insolence ? You are a mean cad ! I think you drove the old captain overboard."

"Hullo, hullo, my young spitfire ! so you want a lesson, do you ? Well, then, take my advice ; hold your tongue in future, else both of you will be put in irons below. I'll

have no mutiny here ; and you, doctor, had best just keep yourself to yourself, else you will find things *raspy* for *you* ! "

With this hint, and a significant nod to the three seated in the shade of the boat, the commander walked away. His advent had struck the party dumb ; his departure had a similar effect upon them.

At length, after a cautious look around, Reginald remarked—

"He must have been listening. After all, he took the matter fairly well. To be called a beast, and to be spoken of as a possible murderer, is a fair test of temper."

"So is 'cubs,'" said Arthur. "And he *is* a beast, anyway ! I would like to find that paper ; then we should know what to believe."

"I am afraid he will find means to 'pay us out,'" said the surgeon, reflectively. "Let us keep quiet. Perhaps we have been too hard on him, though I cannot understand what object he had in setting the captain against him. That he did so is evident."

"What object had our 'dear papa' in sending Arthur in this ship ? Yet he did, knowing I would go also. You yourself were surprised, doctor. Could it be a planned thing, do you think ?"

"Oh, impossible !" exclaimed the surgeon, rising from the desk. "We must be careful, that's all."

The lads acted on this advice. Nothing occurred to alarm them. The *Bertha* approached the Line, and one day, after the heart-breaking "Doldrums" had been passed under steam, the Equinoctial was reached about the end of October.

"One must draw the line somewhere, I suppose," remarked Arthur to Jackson ; "here it is ! Can you *see* it ?" he asked, with a great assumption of innocence.

"Certainly," replied the man, calmly, "it's just ahead. If you ascend to the cross-trees, you may see it dipping

like a gold and silver rope in the waves. Take the glass and have a squint."

"Thanks!" replied Arthur, somewhat abashed; "I'll see presently." He was uncertain what pranks might be played upon him when high jinks were the rule of the road at sea near the Line; so he waited the approach of Neptune patiently.

The sea-king came over the bows in due course, accompanied by his spouse and secretary; he was attended by a number of "policemen" and followers, who seized and questioned the intended victims. These were shaved with a hoop, compelled to swallow grease pills, and then soused in the water-sail, while queerly-dressed animals, seals, and such like assisted in the ducking.

The "doctor" did not escape, and, owing to what some people thought was no accident, the young man having been roughly shaved, soused, and jumped upon in the bath, was hunted down the companion-way. Here he came into violent collision with the commander, who was at that moment ascending. The surgeon was thrown down backwards and rendered insensible by the fall.

Mr. Halbrake was carried below, attended by his young friends and the mate. The festivity of the occasion was not greatly interrupted, but Arthur sat with Reginald in the doctor's berth, conversing in whispers, and with grave faces.

"Artie," said the latter, "we are getting into a fix! It seems to me that we *are* doomed somehow. The *Bertha* is under a ban!"

"I'm afraid there *is* something bad here, Reggie. Cordell is at the bottom of it. I wish he was at the bottom of the sea."

"Yes, he seems inclined to remove us one by one. Who's turn next, I wonder!"

"Do you think that he is a pirate?" exclaimed Arthur.

"Surely our *dear step-father* would not have put us in such a situation. He couldn't!"

"Perhaps he might have had reasons," whispered a strange voice.

The boys started and looked fearfully around. Who had spoken? They were alone with the sleeping man. What could he know, or how could he talk thus in his sleep, wounded as he was? Reginald looked at the invalid, and then whispered—

"The vessel is haunted! I wish we had never come on board. Let us tell Esau."

"No, certainly not," said Arthur. "He will only make things worse. Let us try to beat him at his own game!"

"Right!" whispered the strange voice. "Lie low!"

"That is mysterious," said Reginald, as he went quickly to the door and threw it open. There was no one near; the cabins were silent and darkened.

"Rum!" he remarked as he returned to the doctor's bunk. "Did you speak, doctor?"

"No," was the unexpected reply in a faint tone. "But I heard you and the strange voice. I suspect it was Jackson. He seems a good man."

The lads looked and nodded at each other, and the doctor proceeded in a whisper—

"Listen! That mate intended to seriously cripple me to-day, I'm certain, and to put the injury down to the 'larking on the Line!' Some one had guessed your step-father's plans and warned the late captain. Now Esau thinks I am disabled. Jackson, I suspect, is on our side, and has given us a hint. See?"

"Then you think that Mr. Boscombe *intended* us to die!" exclaimed Reginald. "Is it possible? Oh no; he *couldn't* be so wicked!"

"The mate has *some* instructions, I believe," whispered Mr. Halbrake. "Be careful. I think we may trust

Jackson, and the engineers are honest. Keep quiet now till I am well again, and wait with your eyes wide open. Later on we shall certainly see something!"

The surgeon then lay silent. During the night the lads sat up with him, watching in turn. Esau came down to make inquiry, and Jackson also looked in. The Rushtons attended to their friend under his own directions, and decided to "play possum" until they fell in with a ship or landed somewhere. In this way three weeks passed, and southern climes were reached.

By that time the doctor had perfectly recovered. He assisted in the fishing for the albatross with a hook and bait, and finally secured one of these fine birds by these means. He and all the rest on board enjoyed the novel sights of whales and porpoises, the various birds, and the unusual appearances of the southern climate. A gale drove the *Bertha* past the Falklands, greatly to the disgust of many on board who had anticipated a run ashore; and then, when the weather moderated, the passengers came on deck again muffled up to meet the Antarctic cold. Christmas was already looming on the horizon of the almanac, and festivity was indulged in in anticipation. The doctor stuffed birds (mollymauks and Cape pigeons); Reginald and Arthur fished, shot, and thoroughly enjoyed the voyage, while still on their guard respecting the commander. In fact, to all appearance, the ill-feeling which had arisen on board had by this time passed away.

One afternoon the thermometer fell decidedly, and a report of ice was promulgated. The air became *very* chilly, and bergs were anticipated. Ice for Christmas!

"What a lark!" cried Arthur. "This will be fun! May we land upon an iceberg?"

The commander, who was searching the ocean through his glass, looked steadily and with much interest at the lad. He did not reply at once, but resumed his survey.

"Can we, Mr. Cordell?" asked Arthur again.

"Perhaps," was the reply. "Would you both like it?"

"Rather! eh, Reggie! Wouldn't it be splendid to land on a *real iceberg*?"

"There are no sham ones here," said Mr. Cordell. "None 'made in Germany'! We shall find you one, I daresay," he concluded as he walked across to port.

"You shouldn't run risks, gentlemen," remarked Jackson, who was again at the wheel. "If ye get on, ye may never get off!"

The speaker never looked at the lads; he kept his eyes upon the ocean far ahead, and seemed as if he had been talking to himself in a low tone.

"Look," he cried suddenly, "there's a Christmas-box for you! That's a berg! See, yonder, to starboard bow."

"That!" exclaimed Reginald. "Why, it's *flat*, not pointed, as we have seen in pictures!"

"They is always flat in the Antarctic," replied the sailor. "They are square-looking, not peaky, down here."

By this time the hands had assembled forward to see the first berg of summer in the Antarctic. As the *Bertha* approached the drifting mass, it seemed to emerge from the light mist as a plateau of ice, at least a mile long and quite two hundred and fifty feet high; its breadth could not be at once estimated, but it seemed square. The summit was white and sparkling with snow, which was reflected sharply by the sunbeams, even painfully. The sides of the berg were caverned like cliffs; blue, and even green in places, against which the waves dashed with great force, leaping high up the ice, half way, at times, to the summit. The sea was roaring in the ice-caves, and presented a most magnificent appearance as it retreated, foaming and angry, only to attack the white walls anew.

It *was* magnificent! Splendid! Glorious! All the spectators were silent as the *Bertha* approached the berg.



“What are those black things, Mr. Stevens?”

III

EVEN Arthur Rushton was silent. His idea of a "lark" appeared entirely out of place *vis-à-vis* with the berg.

The *Bertha* was sailing with a south-east wind, but the berg appeared to be drifting towards the barque. At one time some fears were entertained that the vessel would collide with the mass, but the berg passed on with merely a cold recognition of the stranger. The mist seemed increasing, the weather colder, the sea lumpy, as the island of ice passed by in dignified silence.

A man was sent up to the "crow's-nest," a barrel which had been hoisted up to the main-topmast, to scan the horizon for seals, whalers, and any flocs. The look-out was seated in the cask upon a board fixed within it, and he entered it by a trap-door (cut in the bottom of the barrel) from the rigging. When the apparatus had been tested, Arthur, of course, was anxious to ascend and see what he could.

"May we go up?" asked Reginald of the second mate.

"Aye," replied Stevens. "I'll see you safe up. Take care, youngster; the ship's rollin' a tidy bit up there!"

The lads had ascended the rigging before, and with a little assistance one managed to enter the crow's-nest. Arthur went first, as he had suggested the expedition.

"This is splendid," exclaimed the lad. "There are several bergs, and lumps of ice in the sea like little islands. What are those black things, Mr. Stevens?"

He indicated some distant objects which seemed to be floating between the barque and the ice-floe.

"Whales," replied Stevens. "Not *right* whales, though. Those are 'finners,' as we call them."

"*Wrong* whales, I suppose! Are 'finners,' then, 'sinners,'" asked Arthur in his most innocent tone.

"Not particularly, so far as I know," replied the mate,

laughing, "but they are no use to whalers, and so we only catch '*right* whales,' d'ye see?"

"Then, is that a *spout*?" asked the lad, as a thin and steam-like vapour arose from the neighbourhood of the whales.

"Yes, that's a spout," was the reply, as the misty vapour vanished. "It looks different in books, don't it?"

"It does," said Arthur. "I think I'll go down now. The rolling is rather trying. Besides, Reginald is waiting."

"And Tom is expecting you to pay your '*footing*,'" said the mate Stevens. "Got to fork out, sir, please."

So Arthur "forked out" as desired, and descended with a light head and a lighter pocket to warn his brother. Reginald, however, ascended boldly, and entered the barrel, which the top-man had vacated.

Reginald looked around him, and could hardly realise the position. The cold and mist he did not mind; the solitude appeared fearful! There he was, swaying about high above the deck, feeling as if he must fall into the sea when the barque rolled, or upon one of the tiny creatures which, foreshortened below him, moved on the deck. It was a giddy perch!

He looked away over the sea, in which the ice masses, in detachments or skirmishing order, were keeping the advance line of the distant, unknown shore. Farther away the ice-clad ocean was rocking undulating in the swell, which was confined by the "pack." The white reflection troubled the lad, the desolation appeared complete; and shutting his ears to exclude the sounds of the slapping ropes, the noise of the sails, the cries of men and birds, Reginald could almost believe that all the prospect was unreal, as in a dream—that he would awake again in his bunk below and recover his senses! Then he took his fingers from his ears. Even then he fancied the whole incident was unreal, even as he turned to speak to the sailor beside him.

But the look-out man—always on the look-out for "footing"—assured him that all was true and distinct and real. When he had carefully pocketed the "tip," he permitted himself a long look across the ice, muttering something, looking and again muttering.

"Ship ahoy!" he cried suddenly, hailing the deck.

"Where away!" came the response.

"Broad on the starboard beam: lying low on the ice, under the lee of a berg. Looks dismantled."

"Can you make it out?" asked Arthur, when his brother had found him on deck some minutes later.

"No; not likely from here. We are heading for it now, and expect we shall pick her up. Did you like the 'crow's nest'?"

"Not much," replied Arthur. "I didn't like playing 'Cherub aloft.' Felt as if I *had* a *body*, and that my wings were making my head giddy!"

"I say, Artie," suggested Reginald, "when we reach the vessel yonder shall we go aboard?"

"Rather!" was the reply. "Listen! what does Esau say? *Derelict*?—that means stranded or abandoned, doesn't it?"

"Chucked up, I think. But the *beast* won't let us go, never fear! We and the doctor are his pet foes."

"We can try, any way. Come and see Mr. Halbrake."

The surgeon was in his cabin reading and smoking. He heard the report, and guessed the anxiety of the boys. They were most desirous to go.

"Wait until we hear the order to lower the boat," he said after a while. "Then wrap up well, and let us all go and ask the commander. Be ready, mind!"

The lads went out, dressed and made all necessary preparations for the trip, then they came into the doctor's berth again and waited, chatting at intervals, and proposing all kinds of future expeditions.

At last the anticipated order came. The three friends

went on deck, and beheld four men with Jackson ready to embark in one of the boats.

"Let us go too, please, Mr. Cordell," cried Arthur. "We want to see the stranded ship. Please let us all go."

"Oh, you all wish to go, do you? Well, perhaps it will be all the better! Go then. Look sharp, now."

None of the three noticed the tone of Cordell's reply, nor the sneer which had accompanied the permission, nor the savage light in the eyes of the commander-mate. But Jackson intervened when Mr. Cordell had spoken to him.

"Haven't you got any grub?" he asked. "Best get a snack, as in case we're delayed you won't be hungry or thirsty. Where's the guns, sir?"

"They are there," replied the chief. "Mind that rifle; put it down there! I have no fancy to be shot like a jackdaw. There's some tins for you, and a keg. You may make grog if you like. Now, steady! Lower away!"

The boat, well supplied by the steward, and armed, pushed off, and under the influence of the four men rushed through the chopping sea. The eyes of the passengers were fixed upon the derelict, the eyes of the cockswain were fixed on both alternately, with suspicious glances at the lads. But Jackson made no remark. He was thinking of the message which Esau had given him, and it puzzled him; but he held his course. The man in the "crow's-nest" gave him the direction; the barque was kept alongside the floe, clear of the bergs, too, which, agitated by currents of their fellows' making, often swerved out of their course, and compelled the *Bertha* to "yaw," or to come up in the wind, to avoid a collision.

The men rowed well, and the hull of the stranded vessel became more distinct through the gathering mist. The *Bertha* kept a signal flying at the fore, but the bunting

was already indistinct; and though Arthur and others noticed the gradual disappearance of the barque, no one remarked upon the fact. The men knew their bearings and felt no alarm.

"There she is," cried some one. "My stars!" exclaimed the cockswain, "she is a derelict for sure, and one of our whalers like. Give way, lads!"

Bumping, straining, and with many a shock, the boat was impelled in the direction of the derelict, which the occupants of the pinnace succeeded in reaching safely. She was half afloat, under the lee of the berg, upon a long mass of ice attached to the cliffs in front of her. Her stern was free, released by the breaking floe.

She was a barque, but smaller than the *Bertha*, and covered by snow and frost above the water-line, below with barnacles. Truly a derelict vessel; no living thing, save a few birds, was near her until the "*Berthas*" approached.

"It jolly well strikes me," remarked Jackson, "that this is the missing *Gladiator*, which I am told our old skipper expected to fall in with. Poor chaps! They have all died, I expect, unless mayhap they took boat and escaped. I suppose you gents won't want to go aboard?"

"Certainly we do," said Arthur. "That is why we came. Of course we shall go; shan't we, doctor?"

"I should like to look round her," answered the doctor. "What do you think, Jackson?"

"Well, sir, there's no harm, as far as I knows. But I think I wouldn't, somehow!"

"Why?" asked Reginald. "What's the matter?"

"There ain't nothin' the matter," replied the cockswain, looking at the men. "Still, if you're determined, and as I have orders not to stay by the wreck, suppose I report, and come back for you later? There's grub and guns, a rifle, and plenty of daylight for weeks yet, so——"

"All right!" cried Arthur; "hand us up."

The three adventurers climbed up the side of the vessel, and then the beef in tins, the keg, the guns, rifle, and ammunition followed.

"I suppose it *is* all right?" asked the doctor, as the men prepared to go back. "You *will* return?"

"Oh, we'll come back," laughed the stroke oarsman, an ugly-looking customer. "You're all right!"

"I'd rather you'd pull in with us," said Jackson, "I would indeed. I can't wait. Here take this, sir."

"Nonsense!" cried Arthur. "This is real right down Robinson Crusoe business! Don't hurry back. Ta, ta! What did he give you, doctor?"

The cockswain waved his hand in farewell. The men gave way, and the boat quickly left the derelict and gradually was hidden in the still gathering mist, for the breeze was "northing."

Mr. Halbrake made no answer to Arthur's question. He was watching the boat. Then perceiving that the man had handed him some tobacco, he put it in his pocket, having already sufficient for present use. The lads had meantime left him, and he went aft to join them, but he suddenly became conscious of the insecurity of their position—and future!

What if this was a planned trick? Had the commander taken this opportunity to rid himself of the passengers? Jackson could not say much before the men, but, as the doctor now recalled with a fast-beating heart, he had given them broad hints—suggested food; the guns had been the commander's idea. What for? Why had he given them fire-arms?

With a mind far from easy, Mr. Halbrake rejoined the lads, who were about to descend into the cabin, or "saloon" as they pleased to call it. It was at best a wretched place to sleep in, but, under the circumstances, almost repulsive to the surgeon.

Arthur was in high spirits when he descended. Reginald

liked the adventure also. The long-promised "lark" had appeared, had descended on the snow-clad berg, and had taken up its abode upon the derelict for the time being! Therefore the lads were delighted, and skipped down cheerfully. But when they had penetrated into the so-called cabin they paused and listened.

"Didn't you hear a noise, doctor?" asked Reggie.

"No; what kind of noise?" said Halbrake, coming up.

"I think I heard a grunt, or something like it," said Arthur, "a yawn, or like that."

"Perhaps some men are in the bunks there," suggested Reginald.

"Oh, no! the place seems to me too bad. Let us return; the look of the place is enough for me. We need not search far; the cabin would be quite unbearable in a warmer climate."

"I think I saw something," said Reginald. "Look! what are those? Cubs! Run, Arthur; get the guns. Here come the animals. Run, doctor!"

In the dim light two curious objects appeared, and though Halbrake did not think any bears could be there, he retreated on deck before the two animals, which walked upright and had come to meet him. They seemed to be a pair of fine bear-cubs, ragged and dirty. As the animals advanced up the ladder, the adventurers all retreated astern to pick up the guns. But the creatures took no notice of them, and in their turn retreated forward into the forecastle.

"Let's shoot them," suggested Reginald.

"Wait a while," said Mr. Halbrake. "I do not think they are bears at all. Suppose you and I go forward, Reginald, and investigate the matter. Arthur can remain here on watch, and if anything alarm him, he can fire his gun. That will suit you, Arthur; you will then be 'monarch of all you survey.'"

"Very well; only look slippy, please, because I am not up to a big bear-fight. However, I do not see anything very alarming. Make haste and settle the business, because I am getting hungry."

The doctor and Reginald loaded their guns carefully, and went forward. They disappeared down the fore-hatch. Arthur walked the after-deck and went to peep down the cabin-stairs; he even inspected the main hatch, and wondered what was within amidships. The vessel was deserted, apparently, by every one except the two bears, which walked on their hind-legs, and did not speak, as they would have done, he concluded, had they been "only foreigners," not beasts.

Arthur listened for the discharge of the guns, but no sound reached him. The fog had increased, and more icebergs appeared, very close too. They were, in his opinion, closing in towards the derelict, and they might crush it. The north-west wind was rising, and in that case snow and mist were sure to envelop the ocean; and on the whole he decided that Crusoe-life, unless upon a fine and well-supplied island, with complaisant animals for companions, and plenty of shooting and books, was a mistake.

The doctor and his companion had disappeared, and at length Arthur became restless. He called out, then listened, but no reply came to him. He did not wish to fire his gun unless on an emergency, but he felt anxious, and the more so as the fog was encroaching; the bergs looked more terrible, the silence became more distressing. He would have welcomed a bear cub as a relief, but the stern cold silence of Nature and the awful solitude of the derelict preyed upon his nerves.

At length, unable to sustain the strain any longer, Arthur lifted up his voice and sent a *coo-ee* through the fog which must have alarmed and distressed the "King" penguins—birds which take a good deal of alarming too.



“In the dim light two curious objects appeared.”

But even that only aroused in echo a chilling reply from the sheltering berg in front.

His late companions made no response at all, and Arthur Rushton made up his mind to desert his post to seek them.

IV

THE idea of playing "Crusoe" did not then appeal forcibly to the lad, but just when he was thinking very seriously about himself and his companions, he caught sight of them on the forecastle. They were accompanied by the two small "bears" which had attacked them previously. Arthur shouted with joy when he perceived them.

"Oh, I am so glad to see you," he exclaimed. "I thought you were dead! How did you tame those animals? What queer beasts!"

"They are not beasts; they are men—savages if you like, but no beasts," replied the surgeon.

"I don't like them at all," replied Arthur. "But what are they then?"

"Fuegians. They have come from Tierra del Fuego. There is a Norwegian in the forecastle very ill! He has been wrecked on the voyage round the Horn, and it seems he and his friends picked these fellows up. The Norwegians boarded the derelict weeks ago."

"Well, supposing they did, how did they get into the *Gladiator*?" asked Arthur.

"That is what we have been learning. Their ship was disabled, and drifted in this direction before a nor'-wester. It was entirely wrecked on these islands, but fortunately the crew sighted the derelict. They boarded her, starved here, and died here, all but this Northman and his two companions. A terrible fate!"

"Perhaps we had better examine the vessel farther,"

suggested Reginald. "There may be some other unfortunate fellows on board. Let us go."

This suggestion was acted upon, but not until the doctor's advice as regarded a meal had been taken. "We shall require some food," he said; "so let us brace ourselves up before we encounter what may prove unpleasant incidents."

So the tinned beef, biscuits, and the grog were partly disposed of, the savages also assisting in the feast. Then the exploration began. It was not altogether pleasant to begin with, and amidships and 'tween-decks the revelations were extremely nasty. The dead, frozen bodies, the aspects of the remains of the seals, the blubber, and the congealed blood, were too horrible, and combined to cause the adventurers to beat a hasty retreat. They all shuddered at the future prospect. If fate had an intention of keeping them on the derelict, the result would be fatal to them.

Fortunately they came upon a store of food in the captain's cabin, and thus were at ease for the present. Even if they were compelled to remain a few days longer, they need not be hungry. Then, not till then, came the idea of their situation and prospects. The mist had increased, and even Arthur began to tire of Crusoe experiences in the derelict.

"I wonder where we are," said Reginald, after a long, silent survey of the surroundings.

"Never mind where we are," replied Arthur snappishly; "let us get out of it, wherever it is. What do you think, Mr. Halbrake?"

"Well, suppose you and Reginald take the guns and try and shoot some penguins yonder. Meantime I will find fuel, and light a fire in the galley; so, even supposing the boat cannot reach us this evening, we shall be comfortable."

"Jolly!" was the reply, as the lads accoutred themselves for the expedition on the snow. They descended

carefully, and passed over the ice to the deep snowy surface beyond it, sinking deeply at each step, and leaving a trail unmistakable.

The adventurers advanced cautiously, and perceived that the derelict had been driven upon the ice forward, while the stern still floated. However, she appeared firm; and, after staring at the great massive berg so close to them, so beautiful in its purity, so terrible in its calmness even in inaction, the lads advanced from the starboard side of the vessel, towards some seals, near which many penguins were resting themselves. Some of the latter actually leaped out of the "ice pools" upon the snow-field as the lads proceeded.

"Let's get close and blaze away," said Reginald. "Those birds will make soup, the doctor said."

"Look at those seals! they appear quite tame. That one," indicating a great, white-faced animal, "winked at me, Reggie; he really did. Now, look out!"

The lads had approached the penguins, and fired together. A brace fell, and the remainder of the birds scurried away, flapping, and pushing themselves along the snow like queer animated canoes. They made a curious "quacking" noise as they paddled away like aldermanic waiters, in black coats and white waistcoats, seen through the small end of an opera-glass. Their movements were very funny, and the lads laughed heartily at the evolutions of the penguins.

Several birds were secured, amongst them being a few "Cape pigeons," which, as Arthur remarked, had no "good hope" of returning thither. He would have been severely snubbed by his brother for this remark had not Reginald's attention been directed to the derelict, which appeared to be moving!

"Hullo!" he exclaimed; "the vessel is off the ice. Hurry up, Arthur, else we shall be left behind. Lucky we didn't go far!"

This was alarming news. The lads plunged into the snow deep in their tracks; the penguins danced and signalled with their flippers, as if in sympathy, or pleasure, at the occurrence. The lads sank deeply in the white carpet, shouting at times to the doctor. The stillness of the air enabled him to hear their cries, and by them he was made aware of the state of the case, which he had hitherto not suspected. But he had evidently gained the confidence of the two "Bears," for they plunged, waded, or swam to the assistance of the lads, and rescued them, dripping, freezing, numbed, from the grasp of the ice-king; they were all assisted on board the derelict by the surgeon.

He had lighted a fire; and when the half-frozen and wholly saturated lads and the "Bears" had been rescued, the former were put into bunks in the cabin and fed with hot broth. The savages did not mind the wetting; they dried by the fire, and were also fed. But when, late next day, the lads dressed, their clothes were ruined. They looked as if they had purchased the wardrobe of a "scarecrow" from a rag-and-bone merchant who had become insolvent.

The sun was setting in the southward as they came up. One can hardly say "setting," though, because it only dipped into the horizon a little way, and came up again on the rim of the ice-field. The silence was peculiar, the air sparkling and bracing, by no means *very* cold. The sea, where visible, was like a mirror; the mist had receded to the north, the south was clear. The floes were intersected by canals of sea-water, and the distant ice-fields looked like a series of snow-clad water-meadows in which the channels had been half frozen. Farther away the "canals" closed up, and apparently composed a level ice-continent to the sky-line. The effect was beautiful, charming, and altogether delightful; the colours of sky, ice, and water being immensely varied and most artistically combined on Nature's pallet.

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The derelict drifted and the sick men died. The weather became uncertain, alternating mist and thin snow with gales and fierce winds, which caused the adventurers much alarm. The tossings and the crashes and bumpings of the ice caused the little barque to leak seriously, and to threaten dissolution. The end appeared near, and even the stolid "Bears" seemed upset; but release came to them all at last.



"The end appeared near."

"A ship! The barque! There, lying beside that sheltering berg. Shout—fire guns—yell loud!"

Reginald had spied the vessel lying snugly under the lee of the berg, and the three friends at once proceeded to shout and fire shots as suggested. Five days had been passed by the party in the derelict, and the adventurers were satisfied with the experience.

After some delay, and while they were speculating

upon whether the mate had heard the shots, a boat was lowered from the *Bertha* and put out for the derelict. But the channels were so winding that it was quite an hour before the boat reached the sinking ship, and fears of ultimate rescue were expressed by the lads.

Jackson was steering the boat, which came alongside. He climbed up, and stood staring at the whole party in silence, his eyes passing from one to another in turn.

"Well, I *am* busted!" he exclaimed at last. "Who expected to see you and them funny devils? Good job the mate's shot. Who did it, eh?"

"Shot!" exclaimed the three friends. "What do you mean?"

"Why, this. One of your bullets came along and hit him full in the chest. It settled him, you may depend. 'Spect you ain't so sorry, eh?"

"I really do not understand you," said the surgeon. "Did you not expect to see us again? Do you mean *that we were sent away to die?*"

"Well, sir, not you especial. But, sir, I could tell you a secret," he added, as his ruddy face became redder than his hearers', which were already well "burnt" by the snow and wind. "Have you been smoking tobacco?"

"Yes," replied the surgeon. "But what has that to do with the question?"

"Have you smoked what I gave you? No! Then look at the paper. There it is!"

Mr. Halbrake unrolled the stained wrapper which enclosed the "twist," and discovered a written communication—"To the Captain!" He read as follows:—

"There are traitors on board, captain! Oh, be careful of my boys. I cannot tell you anything. I know nothing, but I fear the worst. Be on your guard. May God keep you! I pray for my sons and you!"

"What's this," gasped Halbrake. "The disputed letter! The warning! Look here, boys!"

"Mother's writing!" they exclaimed. "Dearest mother! She *did* suspect, then! Oh that mate!"

"Who are the traitors, Jackson?" asked Mr. Halbrake. "I must and shall know, if I ruin myself to find out."

"Then you'll never do that either way. They are cowed now, whoever they are. The game is up, and what I suspects I sha'n't tell. Let them be, sir."

"And who was so infamous as to desire—to suggest our . . . disappearance?" asked the surgeon, savagely.

"Ah! there I can't help you. I don't know. That's a fact. Now, gentlemen, you're waited for. Come away! What about these two 'Guy Foxes' here? what's to be done about them? Best take 'em and drop them somewhere."

No reply was made to this remark. The boys were thinking of their mother, and of the terrible crime into which their step-father had plunged: the death of the mate his accomplice, and the narrow escape they had had! The captain had already been sacrificed. Alas! no reparation could be made to him! The mate had paid the penalty of his ill-doings—by accident—by chance!

Who could say it was "by chance"? When the rifle was placed in the boat, he had joked about it, and it had caused his death! Was not then the finger of Providence evident? Otherwise, he might have escaped, till, even if he had been convicted in England, the disclosure of the plot would have been disastrous to the family at home. Yes, the best had happened! There is no "chance" in life.

The surgeon and his party returned to the *Bertha*, leaving the derelict and her cargo to the sea to give up her dead. The mate's body was buried in the cold Antarctic Ocean, and the barque sailed for England. Jackson informed the lads of the manner in which Esau met his death. "He was in the 'crow's nest,'" said the sailor, "looking out; whether he expected to see you or not, we

needn't say. May-be he didn't want to! But when you fired the rifle first time, the bullet—aimed high, mind you—hit him full, and he fell dead in the barrel aloft. Awful sudden it was! Then Stevens told us to go for you; and I 'spect we'd a' done that anyway. I was lookin' out for ye myself! There was friends aboard."

"I hope not many of you were concerned with the mate, Jackson," asked the surgeon.

"Oh, well, some was. But no one is now. Of course, if any was really in it all, they'd give in, and tack off the shoal pretty quick! Esau was the prop, d'ye see! I was keepin' a look-out for you."

"Thank you, Jackson. I am sure we are greatly indebted to you; and when we reach England again you shall all receive your deserts in full."

This decision did not appear very promising to Jackson, who touched his cap and went forward amid his mates. But nothing untoward occurred during the passage home; there was nothing to complain of all the while.

The *Bertha* returned after a three months' struggle against tempests and opposing winds. The Fuegians died on the voyage home, but the barque, her crew, and passengers, reached Plymouth in safety, and anchored in the Cattwater.

Mr. Halbrake immediately went ashore with the Rushtons to telegraph the arrival and to report. When he returned to the *Bertha*, he learned that the crew, with the exception of Stevens, the two engineers, Jackson, and twelve hands, had taken French leave and decamped! This was an eloquent testimony to the intentions of Mr. Cordell and his associates.

So soon as Mr. Halbrake had placed the barque in the hands of his uncle's agent, he hastened to Mr. Boscombe's residence in the neighbourhood of Exmouth. There a sinister rumour met him. He learned from the

hotel manager in the town that the young gentlemen had unexpectedly returned from abroad ; that Mr. Boscombe had suddenly left home on important business the next day, and was reported dead !

This rumour was based upon the testimony of an old fisherman, whose boat had been hired that night by a gentleman whose appearance tallied with that of Mr. Boscombe.

When Mr. Halbrake learned this, he returned to Plymouth and wrote to Reginald, who replied that his step-father had certainly left home, after a most unpleasant discussion ; that he himself, his mother, and Arthur intended to sell the house and leave the neighbourhood, because no doubt of his step-father's fate remained. The boat Mr. Boscombe had hired had been found by a crew of "lobstermen," empty, on the morning after his departure, out at sea.

This was the last link in the terrible chain of crime which the insatiable love of money engendered in the merchant's soul. Let us close the sad chapter here.

Reginald, Arthur, and their loving mother came up to London, where in due time the young men appeared. Reginald went into the Church, Arthur became a barrister, and Mr. Halbrake still practises his profession. Indeed, it is from him that the writer of this tale obtained the information which has resulted in this narrative of the "Venture of the *Bertha*," which so nearly ended in the deaths of the young men themselves.

"A FRENCHMAN'S GRATITUDE;"

OR, THE DISASTER OF EL HAMET

BY LIEUT.-COL. PERCY GROVES, ROYAL GUERNSEY ARTILLERY
(LATE 27TH INNISKILLINGS)

Author of "From Cadet to Captain," "Reefer and Rifleman," "A Soldier Born," "On Service," "With the Green Jackets," "Scotland for Ever," &c. &c.

CHAPTER I

A BIRTHDAY PRESENT—OFF TO THE WARS— AN ADVENTURE AT MESSINA

"TOM, my dear boy," said my father, Colonel Sir John Cotton, K.B., as he entered the breakfast room on the morning of the 18th September 1806, "I wish you many happy returns of to-day. There's a present which will give you genuine pleasure," he went on, handing me a formidable-looking letter; "it is your appointment to an ensigncy in my old regiment, the gallant 35th."

I had that day attained my seventeenth year, and was at home on a short *exeat* from Eton; but now Eton would know me no more—at least, not as a fifth-form boy—for had I not suddenly blossomed into a subaltern in his Majesty's service? It was a proud moment, and I cannot recall any event in my life that has caused me greater satisfaction.

I received the congratulations of my parents and sisters

—I had no brother—with becoming modesty ; but the congratulations of the ladies were turned into lamentations when Sir John informed us that I was to embark, to join headquarters in Sicily, in a fortnight's time.

"John !" exclaimed my mother, the tears welling up into her eyes, "are we really to lose the dear boy so soon ?"

"What a shame !" chorused my three sisters.

"Nonsense ! Tom has not entered the army to dangle about drawing-rooms and exhibit himself in a red coat to all the young ladies of his acquaintance," retorted my father. "The 35th lost a good many men at Maida—egad ! I wish I had been there—and a draft is going out to fill up the gaps. Tom will sail with the draft, which is under command of our friend Charles Holroyd, who—Halloa ! where has Kate gone ?" For my eldest sister had hurriedly left the room.

"How thoughtless of you, John !" said my mother reproachfully.

"Yes, father," chimed in Miss Laura ; "have you forgotten that Kate and Captain Holroyd are engaged ?"

"And she had no idea that he was going abroad again so soon," added Annie ; "he only came home early in August !"

"Tut ! tut ! I am always putting my foot in it," exclaimed Sir John, looking very guilty. "Poor Katie ! she will lose her lover and her brother at the same time."

This unfortunate remark called forth a flood of tears from the ladies, and muttering something about being "a blundering old idiot," my father beat a hasty retreat.

Captain Charles Holroyd—the mention of whose name caused our family circle to break up "i' the most admir'd disorder"—had served in the 35th with my father, with whom he was a great favourite. Holroyd now commanded the light company of the 35th, and was home on sick leave, in consequence of a wound received at the

battle of Maida. He had not long been engaged to my sister, who, until Sir John spoke, knew nothing of his approaching departure. *Hinc illæ lachrymæ!*

The next two weeks were busy ones—uniforms and necessaries had to be ordered, farewell visits to relatives and friends paid, &c.—and they passed all too quickly. It was a wrench to leave the dear ones at home, and both Charles Holroyd and I were in very subdued spirits when we jumped into the post-chaise which was to take us to Gravesend, there to embark on board the *Lord Bacon*, a battered, wall-sided old collier, whose owners found it more profitable to carry troops to the Mediterranean than coals from Newcastle.

Adverse winds kept us bobbing about in the Downs for several days. Then we met with heavy weather in the Bay of Biscay. Thus it was not until the middle of November that we disembarked at Messina, where the headquarters and flank companies of the 35th were stationed. I received a cordial welcome from my brother officers, and quickly became quite at home amongst them. They all appeared pleased to have the son of their old colonel in the regiment.

At the request of Charles Holroyd, I was posted to the light company; a great honour for a newly-fledged ensign, though one I owed rather to Holroyd’s influence, and the respect felt for my father, than to my own merits.

The adjutant and drill-sergeant soon initiated me into the mysteries of drill, guards, &c., and at the end of six weeks I was reported fit for duty.

I have no intention of giving any account of my life during the time I remained at Messina, but will pass at once to an adventure which befell me a few weeks before the departure of the regiment from Sicily.

At that time there were in Messina several French officers on parole; amongst them a certain Lieutenant Eugene de Vignes. De Vignes was a gentlemanly, well-

bred man of six or seven and twenty, and as he spoke a little English, and seemed to wish to be friendly, Holroyd and I struck up an acquaintance with him. He used to ride and walk with us, and often passed an evening at our quarters; when he would relate his experiences of service, under "*Le Petit Caporal*," in Italy and Egypt. After a while we began to see less of De Vignes, and his evening



"I immediately ran forward to the scene of action."

visits almost entirely ceased; though, when we did meet, he was as pleasant and companionable as ever. One night, towards the end of January 1807, I was returning to my quarters, after visiting a brother subaltern at the other side of the town. Part of my way lay along a lonely road, skirting the garden walls of a convent, in which many young Sicilian ladies of noble family were domiciled. I had nearly reached the end of this wall, when I heard a

shrill scream, followed by angry shouts and other sounds of strife. I immediately ran forward to the scene of action, and, though it was very dark, could just discern four men assailing a fifth, who, with his back to the wall, was making a stout defence. Naturally I espoused the weaker cause, and in another minute three of the cowardly assailants had fled, while the fourth lay on the ground with a sword-thrust through his body.

"A thousand thanks, m'sieur!" exclaimed the man to whom I had rendered such timely aid; "you have saved my life! That charge of yours was splendid! it——"

"De Vignes!" I cried, recognising his voice.

"Ha! it is you, then, *mon ami*," he said, wiping the blade of his sword. "I shall never forget this service. Are you alone?"

"Yes. Why did the ruffians attack you?"

"Hope of plunder, I suppose," replied De Vignes, shrugging his shoulders. And stooping down he proceeded to examine his fallen foe.

"Have you killed him?" I asked.

"He still breathes, and might be saved if we could get assistance."

"I am afraid there will be trouble over this business," I remarked, wishing that my friend had not been quite so handy with his sword.

"Bah! these little affairs are common enough in Sicily," De Vignes rejoined. "However, we may as well try to save his life. Will you go for help? There is a house some fifty yards down the road, and I shall want water, rags for bandages, and a little cognac or other spirit."

"Suppose the other ruffians return?" I objected.

"They will not return," he answered impatiently. "Come, *mon ami*! be quick, I pray you, or this unhappy wretch will bleed to death." Thus exhorted, I started off

down the road ; but not a sign of any sort of habitation could I discover.

I retraced my steps, and on reaching the spot where the encounter took place, found, to my astonishment, that both De Vignes and the wounded robber had disappeared—not a trace of them was to be seen ! I waited about a few minutes, and then hastened to my quarters.

Charles Holroyd had not gone to bed when I returned, and to him I related my adventure.

“It is a queer business,” he remarked ; “seems to me that our French friend sent you on a fool’s errand, with the express intention of getting rid of you.”

“I believe he did,” I answered. “Shall I make an official report of the affair ?”

“We will see what the colonel says, Tom,” was his reply.

On the following morning there was a terrible hue and cry, for the daughter of Prince T—— was missing from the convent, and one of his Highness’s servants had been found dead in a ditch hard by the convent walls, with a sword-thrust through his heart.

“There can be no doubt the young woman has gone off with De Vignes,” said my captain when we heard the news. “They were probably watched and surprised by the prince’s servants. You say you heard a woman scream ?”

“I am certain of that.”

“Just so,” continued Holroyd ; “I see the whole thing ! She got away, and her lover covered her retreat ; then you came to the rescue, and his assailants having fled, De Vignes wanted to rejoin the girl without your knowledge ; so he sent you off on pretence of seeking aid for the wounded man, and, as soon as he had got rid of you, bolted himself. Tom, we will hold our tongues about this affair.”

That Holroyd was right in his conjectures was pretty

evident, for we saw no more of Eugene de Vignes in Messina ; though we were destined to meet him again elsewhere.

CHAPTER II

DEPARTURE FROM MESSINA—LANDING IN EGYPT—FIRST
SUCCESSES—REVERSE AT ROSETTA—OCCUPATION OF
EL HAMET—SIEGE OF ROSETTA COMMENCED

" ' I THOUGHT I heard the general say,
Strike your tents at break of day ;
Strike your tents and march away,
March, march away ! ' "

sang, or rather shouted, Lieutenant Patrick Cantillon of the light company, as he burst into our quarters one hot afternoon, a few weeks subsequent to my adventure on the convent road.

" Tom, ye lazy divil ! is it sleepin' ye are ? " And he caught me a whack on the shoulder that nearly knocked me out of my chair.

" Don't make such a confounded row, Paddy ! " I exclaimed irritably ; for I had been indulging in a *siesta*, and this " rude awakening " startled me not a little. " Why the deuce can't you come in quietly ? "

" Come in quietly, bedad !—hark to him ! " cried my brother sub, capering round the room. " Sure, man, am I not ready to jump out of me skin ! "

" Then I wish you'd jump out of it somewhere else, " I retorted. " What's the matter with you ? "

" Listen while I tell ye, alannah, " said Paddy, coming to an anchor on my camp-bed. " May-be ye know that some six years ago we kicked the French out of Egypt, and put the Turks in possession of Alexandria and other towns on the Egyptian coast. Now Boney has humbugged the Sultan to enter into an alliance with France ;

so our Government—more power to its elbow!—has decided to send an expedition to turn the Turks out of the very places we turned them into; in short, we're goin' to punish the haythins for havin' the impudence to hobnob and make friends with the French."

"And are we to join this expedition, Paddy?" I asked.

"We are, me son," was the reply.

Paddy Cantillon's news proved to be true. Orders had already been issued for an expedition to be fitted out in Sicily, for the purpose of making a descent on the coast of Egypt, and occupying Alexandria and Rosetta, and the same evening it was officially notified that the 35th would be one of the regiments employed on this service.

The expedition sailed from Sicily on the 6th March. The military force was under Major-General Mackenzie Fraser, and consisted of the 20th Light Dragoons,¹ a detachment of artillery, the 31st, 35th, 78th, and De Rolle's regiments, and the Chasseurs Britanniques.² We encountered very bad weather shortly after putting to sea; nineteen sail parted company on the night of the 7th, and it was not until the 15th that we sighted the Arabs' Tower.

Before allowing the transports to approach within sight of the coast, our commodore (Captain Hallowell of the *Apollo*, 74) ran in-shore to obtain some information. Major Misset, the British resident at Alexandria, advised an immediate landing, assuring the commodore that the inhabitants were favourably disposed towards us, and inimical to the French; accordingly the transports were signalled to stand close in, as soon as the squadron anchored in the western harbour. A summons to surrender was then sent to the Turkish governor, which he promptly declined.

¹ The 20th Light Dragoons—raised as the Jamaica Light Horse in 1791, styled the 20th Light Dragoons in 1794, and disbanded in 1817.

² De Rolle's Regiment and the Chasseurs Britanniques—foreign corps in British pay. Both were disbanded or absorbed in 1814-15.

The weather was still very heavy, and a nasty sea was running; nevertheless our leaders decided to land an advanced party at once. This party, which included the light company of the 35th, numbered a thousand men, under command of Colonel John Oswald of the 35th.

We effected a landing without serious opposition, and next morning carried the western lines and forts, driving out the Turks and taking several guns. Meanwhile the castle of Aboukir having surrendered, the remainder of the transports stood in and anchored in the bay. Seeing that we meant business, the Governor of Alexandria capitulated on the 21st March, and we took possession of the city, harbour, and fortresses.

Thus far success had attended our arms; but we were now to meet with the first of those reverses which culminated in the disaster of El Hamet.

Our naval force having been augmented by the arrival of Sir John Duckworth's squadron from the Dardanelles, it was decided to attack Rosetta. On the 26th March, Major-General Wauchope, with the 31st and Chasseurs Britanniques, marched against Rosetta, and occupied the heights of Abourmandour, which command that town. Rosetta is situated some five miles from a branch of the Nile, in a beautiful district covered with date, pomegranate, banana, and other trees. The town is surrounded by a low wall, and its streets are very narrow—in fact, mere lanes and alleys.

On the 28th, Wauchope entered Rosetta at the head of the 31st Regiment. Not a soul was astir, not a sound was heard, as our troops wended their way through the streets towards the market-place in the centre of the town; but they had barely got half-way when the death-like silence was broken by a furious fusillade. From the windows and roof of every house a deadly fire was poured upon them. Cooped up in the narrow streets, unable to return the hidden enemy's fire, our gallant fellows fell fast.

Wauchope was shot dead, his second-in-command seriously wounded, and in a short time nearly three hundred officers and men were placed *hors de combat*. There was no alternative but a retreat, and so the remnants of Wauchope’s force returned to Alexandria.

Though not a little disconcerted by this serious and unexpected reverse, Fraser determined to make another attempt on Rosetta; indeed the reduction of that town was necessary to the safe possession of Alexandria, now threatened with famine.

The execution of this second attack was entrusted to Brigadier-General the Hon. William Stewart, with a force consisting of detachments of the 20th Light Dragoons and Royal Artillery, the 35th, 78th Highlanders, De Rolle’s Regiment, and two hundred sailors from the fleet.

We quitted Alexandria, in the highest spirits, on the 5th April, and advanced towards Rosetta by way of the village and lake of Edko, where a *dépôt* was established. Before advancing to Abourmandour, Stewart considered it advisable to drive the enemy away from El Hamet—a village up the Nile, some two leagues above Rosetta—and take possession of the place, in order to secure his rear, and an uninterrupted communication with the *dépôt* on Lake Edko. This service was successfully accomplished on the 6th, and El Hamet was occupied by a strong detachment of De Rolle’s, under Major Vogelsang.

On the following day the heights and fort of Abourmandour were reoccupied without opposition. A summons to surrender being contemptuously ignored by the Turkish commandant of Rosetta (who had been reinforced by a corps of Albanians), Stewart advanced to the sand-hills encircling the town, which he at once proceeded to invest.

From the great extent of Rosetta, our brigadier saw it would be impossible, with the slender force at his disposal, to invest more than half of the place; so he took up a

line from the Nile to the front of the Alexandrian gate, thence retiring towards the plain, where he posted his light dragoons. Rosetta being thus only partially invested, its garrison had a free communication across the Nile to the Delta.

At this time Stewart confidently expected to be reinforced by the Mamelukes, from Upper Egypt, who were known to be inimical to the French, and at loggerheads with Mohammed Ali, but day after day passed without any appearance of these redoubtable warriors. The siege, however, was carried on with great vigour; our gunners hammered away at Rosetta, without doing any great harm to the Turks (whose numbers daily increased), while we of the infantry were constantly employed on piquet and other harassing duties. Our piquets and advanced posts were several times attacked, and on the 19th April a company of De Rolle's was surrounded and cut to pieces by the Turkish horsemen.

CHAPTER III

EL HAMET—AN UNWELCOME DUTY—CHARLES HOLROYD
SPEAKS HIS MIND—THE BEGINNING OF THE END

BEFORE continuing my narrative, I will briefly state the position of El Hamet. From Lake Edko to the Nile is an isthmus about two and a half miles in extent, varying according to the depth of water in the lake. The remains of a deep dry canal with high banks extend from the river nearly two-thirds across the isthmus, the banks commanding the plain on either side; and on the south side of the canal, about half-way across the isthmus, is the village of El Hamet. On the banks of the Nile and at El Hamet are the only regular passes through the banks of the canal.

News of the disaster to the company of De Rolle's



“ Our gunners hammered away at Rosetta.”

Regiment reached General Stewart early on the 20th April, and he immediately despatched a force, under Lieutenant-Colonel Patrick Macleod (commanding the 2nd Battalion 78th¹), to reinforce Vogelsang. Macleod's force was composed of a piquet of the 20th Light Dragoons, two guns, two companies of the 35th, and five of the 78th.

On the afternoon of the 20th April our company was on duty in one of the batteries. Charles Holroyd, Paddy Cantillon, and I were with the company, none of us feeling particularly amiable. Our artillery had been blazing away all day at Rosetta, while we had little or nothing to do except to listen to the eternal "bang, bang" of the guns; a sort of music that gets monotonous, especially when one wishes to indulge in "forty winks."

"I'm sick of this business!" exclaimed Paddy, as we sat with our backs against the parapet. "Sorra a bit of diversion do I see in squattin' on me hams in a damp ditch!"

"Take things as they come, Paddy," rejoined Holroyd, who was discussing a piece of salt junk and a ship's biscuit. "Now, I should much prefer to dine off a spatch-cock or a devilled kidney, but as I can't get such luxuries, I—Halloa, Harris! what ill wind blows you here?"

"An order for you, Holroyd," replied Harris, our worthy adjutant, who came hurrying up at this moment. "The light company has been detailed as an escort for an ammunition column about to start for El Hamet, and the general desires you to deliver this despatch to Colonel Macleod."

"But we're on piquet, my dear fellow," expostulated Holroyd, not relishing the idea of a long tramp across the desert. "Besides, it is not our turn, you know; we only

¹ This 2nd Battalion of the 78th (Ross-shire Buffs) Highlanders was raised in 1804. Patrick Macleod was its first commanding officer. The battalion distinguished itself at the battle of Maida, and subsequently in the Netherlands. It was reduced in 1816-17.

returned from escort duty last night. Where is James's company?"

"Turning out to relieve you; he'll be here in five minutes," was the reply.

"Then why not send him to El Hamet?" asked Holroyd.

"Because the general's orders are for the light company to go," answered the adjutant; "so I have no choice in the matter."

"Very considerate of the general," growled my captain; "however, 'needs must, when a certain old gentleman drives'!"

Guided by the adjutant, we marched to the spot where the ammunition column was awaiting us, and in half-an-hour we were on our way across the desert to El Hamet.

Every march comes to an end, and it was with a deep sigh of relief that we at length reached El Hamet. Holroyd at once went off to report his arrival and deliver the despatch to Colonel Macleod, while we waited his return, fondly hoping that we should be dismissed to a well-earned rest. We were, however, doomed to disappointment.

Our captain soon rejoined us, and I knew at once, by the expression of his face, that he was thoroughly put out.

"Light company," said he, in short, sharp tones, "there'll be no rest for any of us to-night. Colonel Macleod has desired me to take up a position among the sand-hills in front of El Hamet, and remain there until further orders. You can fall out for a few minutes, and make the best meal you can on what you've got in your haversacks. A ration of cooked beef, biscuit, and rum will be issued to each man shortly after daybreak."

"Faith, this is a pleasant state of affairs!" grumbled Cantillon, as we moved away from the company.

“Does Colonel Macleod expect an attack before day-break?” I asked.

“I suppose he does,” Holroyd replied, “for he said a great deal about the necessity for vigilance; though he neither gave me any idea from what quarter danger is to be chiefly apprehended, nor of his plans in the event of a sudden attack in overwhelming force. I feel sure,” he went on, “that Colonel Macleod is wrong in posting us so far in advance of El Hamet, as it will be impossible to keep up communication, except by occasional patrols; thus the company will stand a serious risk of being cut off, and the village, which, I understand, we are supposed to protect, will be placed in jeopardy.”

Rather surprised at these critical remarks, I ventured to remind my captain that Generals Fraser and Stewart thought very highly of Colonel Macleod, and that the 78th Highlanders swore by him.

“True, Tom,” rejoined Holroyd. “Macleod’s character as a regimental commander most deservedly stands high, and a braver man there is not in the British army; nevertheless, judging by what I have heard and observed, I don’t think he is the right sort of officer to hold a separate command at an important post. He lacks firmness and promptness of decision, and should an emergency arise, I much doubt if he will be properly prepared to meet it. Anyhow, I intend to use my own judgment in taking up the position assigned to us, and instead of moving the whole company up to the sand-hills, I shall leave Cantillon, with the left subdivision, half-way between them and the village. We shall then have a support to fall back on if hard pressed.”

“What of the Mamelukes?—have they turned up?” asked Paddy.

“Not that I know of,” was the reply. “The ammunition we escorted is intended for them; but my own impression is that Mohammed Ali will make up his differ-

ences with their beys, and if we see them at all it will be as enemies, not allies. Let us rejoin the men ; it is time we were moving."

Leaving Cantillon, with half the company, under a clump of date-trees, Holroyd led the way to the sand-hills, where he posted our men to the best advantage—a sergeant, corporal, and four files being stationed as an outpost on a slight eminence a little to our right front. Having taken up our position, we anxiously waited events, keeping a very sharp look-out.

CHAPTER IV

AN ALARM—NOT FRIENDS, BUT FOES—AN UNHEEDED REPORT—AN ANXIOUS NIGHT

SHORTLY after midnight the corporal hurried in from the outpost to report that a *djerm* (large boat), crowded with men, had been observed dropping down the river.

"Did you see this *djerm* yourself, Corporal Jones?" asked Holroyd, jumping to his feet.

"Plain as I sees your honour," was the corporal's reply. "We all see it, sir ; for the moon's so bright that it's just as clear as day. Sergeant Finnigan says as how he thinks it's them Mammyluks as there's been such talk about."

"The deuce he does !" exclaimed Holroyd. "Whereabouts is this *djerm* ? On our side of the river ?"

"Yes, your honour ; 'twas nigh that chapel-looking place on the river bank."

"Chapel-looking place ! You mean the mosque, I suppose," said Holroyd, smiling. "Come, Tom, we'll go and see for ourselves. Take charge until I return, Sergeant Bullen, and be well on the alert."

We hastened to the outpost, where we found Sergeant

Finnigan with his men ready for any emergency. Close to the river bank, within four hundred paces of the outpost, stood a small mosque, its slender crescent-crowned minaret shooting up gracefully from amid the dark foliage by which it was surrounded.

"There's a jham yonder, sorr," said Sergeant Finnigan, a fine old fellow, who had put Charlie Holroyd through his facings when he first joined the 35th, and had been



"Very cautiously we made our way down the sand-hills."

my father's orderly in days of yore. "A jham, your honour, full of Mammyluks, I'm afther thinkin'."

"I don't see her, Finnigan," rejoined Holroyd, looking in the direction pointed out. "Where is she?"

"The clump of trees hides her, sorr," answered the sergeant; "but she's there shure enough. Does your honour think they're the Mammyluks?"

"We'll hope so, Finnigan, but I have my doubts," said Holroyd. "Tom," he added, after a moment's hesitation, "let you and I creep down nearer the river, and

have a look at this mysterious craft. We must discover whether she's a friend or foe."

Very cautiously we made our way down the sand-hills, moving directly towards the mosque for the first hundred yards, then edging away to the left until we had a full view of the river.

This is what we saw. Just below the mosque were some fishermen's huts, and a small wooden pier, or wharf, projecting into the Nile. Within a couple of oars' length of the wharf lay, not *one*, but *two* large *djerms*, both filled with armed men. By the bright light of the moon we could discern them as clearly as in daytime.

My companion had with him a small field-glass, through which he carefully examined the *djerms*—or rather their occupants.

"Well, are they the Mamelukes?" I whispered impatiently.

"Egad! they're not," was the reply. "They are Albanians, without doubt, and therefore enemies. Look for yourself, and you will see their kilts, or petticoats."

I took the glass, and saw at once that Holroyd was right; there was no mistaking the Albanian costume.

"There are between two and three hundred of them," said Holroyd, as I returned the telescope. "I must report this at once, Tom."

We hurried back to the piquet, and Corporal Jones was sent off to warn Colonel Macleod of the proximity of a large body of the enemy; while another man took a message to Cantillon to advance nearer to the sand-hills, and be on the *qui vive* in case of a sudden attack.

"Not that I think they'll trouble us yet awhile," observed Holroyd; "so, with the exception of advancing our support, I shall keep to our present position until I receive further orders."

Corporal Jones made good use of his legs, for scarcely half-an-hour elapsed before he returned to the outpost.

"Please, your honour," said he, saluting his captain, "the answer is 'All right.'"

"All right!" exclaimed Holroyd, his face darkening; "is that all Colonel Macleod said to you?"

"That is all, sir," was the reply. "I gave the colonel your message, just as your honour gave it to me, neither more nor less. 'Tell Capt'n Holroyd it's all right,' says he. I saluted, and waited a moment, thinkin' as how he'd say something more, or may-be ask me some questions; but the colonel just waves me away, and says, 'D'ye hear me, corp'r'il?—tell your oficer it's all right.' So I comes back as quick as I could, sir."

Holroyd and I stared at one another in astonishment. That Corporal Jones had delivered the report and brought back the reply correctly we did not for a moment doubt; for Jones was a steady, intelligent man, and thoroughly trustworthy, or he would not have been a light company corporal.

"What shall you do, Charlie?" I asked in an undertone. "There must be some mistake."

"A very serious mistake, I should say," he rejoined. Then turning to the corporal, he inquired if Colonel Macleod was in the village.

"No, sir," answered Jones; "the colonel's over yonder—away to our right rear. There's a young oficer with a few men of Rolle's in the village," he added.

Holroyd thought for a few minutes, and then taking me aside, said, "I must let them know in El Hamet the state of affairs, so that they may be prepared in the event of a sudden attack. Do you, Tom, hurry back to the village and warn the senior oficer. Tell him that the enemy evidently mean mischief, and that I advise him to look out for squalls. On your way you can inform Cantillon of the situation, and say that he must be ready to support us the moment he hears a shot fired."

I started off on my errand, and warned both Paddy

Cantillon and the officer at El Hamet—a young ensign of De Rolle's, Schmidt by name—that they must be prepared for any emergency. On regaining the piquet, I found that several more *djerms* had dropped down the Nile, and were lying off the little wharf. Holroyd had therefore sent a written report to Colonel Macleod, calling his attention to the gravity of the situation and requesting instructions.

Corporal Jones was again the messenger, and his face was a study when he returned, and reported that the only answer vouchsafed by the colonel was "Very well."

"You told him that I awaited instructions?" said Holroyd, looking very incensed.

"I did, sir; but the colonel only said 'Very well'; not another word, good, bad, or indifferent, your honour."

"Tom, this is too grave a contingency to be trifled with," said my captain, taking me aside; "and as Macleod has sent me no orders, I must act on my own responsibility. I fear that our force is so scattered that it would be a dangerous matter to bring it together again; knowing this, Macleod is probably unwilling to try the experiment, and so has contented himself with sending a report to General Stewart of the enemy's proximity. But," he continued, "I am not going to run the risk of being cut off in such an exposed position as this, and therefore I shall warn the officer at El Hamet to put the village into as good a state of defence as time will allow, and we will cover him while so employed. We shall then have something like a post to fall back on, if driven in; for we ought to be able to make a very fair fight of it in the village. Give me a leaf out of your note-book, Tom—I suppose that young fellow understands English?"

"He speaks it fairly well," I answered, handing him a pencil and a piece of paper.

Holroyd wrote his note and despatched it to the village; then we once more took our station with the

advanced outpost, in order to observe the first hostile movement that might be made. Towards morning a thick fog came on, completely hiding the mosque and river from our view; indeed we could not see anything fifty yards before us, and had to trust entirely to our ears.

I need hardly add that not one of us closed his eyes that night.

CHAPTER V

AN UNDESERVED REPROOF—COLONEL MACLEOD CONVINCED—THE ATTACK—EL HAMET EVACUATED

THE night passed without any attack being attempted; though once, towards daybreak, we fancied that we heard the sound of marching men approaching our post from the direction of the mosque, but the sound—if it existed save in our heated imaginations—died away, and all again was silent as the grave.

Towards seven o'clock in the morning—the river fog being then as dense as ever—Colonel Macleod, accompanied by a staff officer and an orderly dragoon, visited the piquet. The colonel looked pale and weary, as well he might, and his face wore a peculiar irritable expression; in fact, he had the appearance of a man worn out with anxiety and fatigue.

"You sent me two reports during the night, Captain Holroyd," he began, in querulous tones, barely acknowledging our salute; "pray what do they mean, sir?"

"Mean, colonel!" exclaimed Holroyd, his face flushing with anger. "Exactly what they stated—namely, that since midnight the enemy have been gathering in considerable force within gunshot of this spot. When I sent you my second report, sir—a written report—no less than fifteen large *djermes*, crowded with men, were moored

in the river yonder. The thick fog now hides them from your view, but there they were, and there, I doubt not, they are at this moment."

"I don't think so," retorted Colonel Macleod; "were the enemy so close at hand, in such numbers, we should at least *hear* them. Now, sir, since the fog came on, have you heard any sound that would indicate the proximity of a large body of troops?"

"I cannot say that I have, sir," Holroyd admitted; "though we fancied——"

"Fancied!" interrupted Colonel Macleod. "Just so! It is my firm belief that your own fancies have deceived you, and I must beg that, when on outpost duty, you will take the trouble to make yourself better acquainted with what is near you, and not send in reports of an enemy's advance until you are absolutely certain there is really an enemy within a couple of miles. In this case you have evidently mistaken a few fishermen's boats for a hostile flotilla.

"I had intended to relieve you," continued Macleod; "but now——" He stopped short, and uttered an exclamation of astonishment, for at that moment a strange though perfectly natural thing happened.

The morning sun—as if anxious to prove the truth of Charles Holroyd's statements, and confound the incredulous Highlander—suddenly appeared struggling through the mist, and rapidly dispelling it. Away rolled the fog, disclosing to our gaze a group of horsemen; conspicuous among whom was a little man, pointing with a javelin to the right of our position.

Then arose upon the morning air a confused noise—beating of drums and clashing of cymbals—and as the fog cleared off, there appeared before us the Turkish army, numbering at least 6000 combatants, of whom perhaps one-third were horsemen.

As soon as he recovered from his amazement, Colonel

Macleod, like the true Highland gentleman he was, turned to my companion, and extending his hand, said—

"Captain Holroyd, I have done you an injustice! Allow me to recall the remarks I made just now, and to offer an apology to you and the light company of the 35th."

"Say no more, sir, I beg you," rejoined Holroyd, warmly shaking the colonel's hand. "Your remarks are already forgotten."



"As the fog cleared off, there appeared before us the Turkish army."

We afterwards were thankful that we had not parted with the gallant Macleod in anger; for, alas! destiny had willed that ere another sun rose he should be

a thing
O'er which the raven flaps his funeral wing."

That my account of what followed may be better understood, I will here state the order in which Colonel Macleod's force was disposed.

The range of low sand-hills stretching from Lake Edko to the Nile—a distance of at least two miles—was everywhere accessible to infantry ; but, owing to the steepness of the slope and inequality of the surface, cavalry could only operate against us at two points—namely, along a road passing through El Hamet, and by fording the lake a few hundred yards beyond the southern extremity of the ridge, where the water was extremely shallow. Now, as Macleod's rear was covered by the dry, steep-banked canal, and the road through El Hamet commanded by two six-pounders, his position might have been accounted an excellent one had it been properly manned (two thousand British troops, with a fair proportion of artillery and an ample supply of ammunition, could have held it till doomsday against ten times their number of Turks) ; but unfortunately Macleod's entire force did not muster eight hundred men, and he had only four six-pounder field-pieces. This slender corps had to occupy and defend the entire line of sand-hills from one extremity to the other, and it was distributed along that line as follows :—

The force was divided into three bodies : one, numbering some three hundred men, being posted beside the river ; a second, of about the same strength, in the centre of the position ; while the third, of which we formed part, had to defend El Hamet, watch the road passing through the village, and support the two guns enfilading that road. Thus there was an interval of about three-quarters of a mile between the several divisions ; and in order that communications might be kept up, each division had to throw out, right and left, small detachments, which took post, here and there, along the ridge.

It is plain that a position thus held was practically at the mercy of a greatly superior enemy ; a couple of hundred resolute men would have been sufficient to break through the scattered line at any point, save at the principal defences, and a breach in the line at any point must

necessarily render the whole untenable. That the position must be forced if a determined and well-sustained attack were made, was almost a foregone conclusion ; but I do not think any one anticipated the terrible disaster which befell us on that fatal day.

To return to my narrative.

We stood for some minutes gazing at the Turkish force. Their infantry was drawn up in detached bodies, each under its own banner ; the horsemen, in a solid mass, formed a second line.

“Look, sir,” suddenly exclaimed the staff officer ; “their cavalry has separated !”

“I see, Vincent,” rejoined Macleod. “The column moving off is evidently ordered to cross the lake and turn our flank.”

“While those who remain will no doubt support the infantry in an attack on the village,” observed Holroyd. “Shall I defend El Hamet, colonel ?”

“Yes,” cried Macleod, vaulting into his saddle ; “to the last man !” and putting spurs to his charger, he galloped to the rear.

Having re-formed the company, we marched back to El Hamet at a quick step, and on the way were joined by two or three small parties which had been ordered to retire from the sand-hills. On reaching the village, we found that the officer and men of De Rolle’s Regiment had made good use of their time : the houses had been loop-holed, windows and doors barricaded ; in short, El Hamet was in a fairly defensible state.

“Come, we shall be able to hold out a long time !” exclaimed Holroyd cheerfully. Then pointing to a building of considerable size and height, he said, “Take the right section, Tom, and occupy the roof of that house. Let the men make a parapet of their knapsacks, and open fire the moment the enemy are within range. Don’t throw a shot away, my lads.”

I hastened to obey this order, and followed by Sergeant Finnigan and the right section, ascended to the flat roof of the house. The men took off their packs, and placed them against the low parapet, so as to afford extra protection. From this elevated position we could see the Turkish horsemen as they advanced towards the village, brandishing their javelins and scimitars, and uttering loud cries of defiance.

"They're about within range, Misther Cotton," presently observed Sergeant Finnigan. "Won't your honour open fire?" And I was about to answer in the affirmative when I heard Holroyd calling to me.

"Tom!" he shouted, "we're to evacuate El Hamet. The guns are limbered up, so come down at once."

There was nothing for it but to obey; so we quitted the roof, and joined our comrades, who, with the detachment of De Rolle's, were forming up in the narrow street, where the two six-pounders were waiting to start. We soon cleared the village, and went away at a long trot, into the heart of the sandy plain.

"Who ordered the evacuation?" I asked, as I found myself alongside of my captain.

"Macleod," was the reply; "and I fear he has made a fatal mistake. But the pace is too good for talking, Tom. We shall want all our breath before we've done."

CHAPTER VI

THE RETREAT—AT BAY

HARDLY were we clear of the village when the Turkish horsemen came sweeping down into the plain, howling ferociously as they galloped here and there. From time to time they made demonstrations of an immediate attack, whereupon Holroyd would call a halt, and order the guns

to unlimber; but the moment the enemy saw the six-pounders at "action rear," he retired out of range. Then the gunners limbered up, and we resumed our march. This happened, I think, three or four times.

We had not got very far into the plain when we were joined by a detachment of De Rolle's Regiment, under Major Vogelsang. The major, who as senior officer assumed command, told us that Macleod had ordered him to retire from his position, leaving a strong piquet to cover his retreat, and move obliquely across the plain until he fell in with us. We were then to join forces and wait for further orders.

"Colonel Macleod has ridden off to withdraw the remainder of the force," explained Vogelsang, in his broken English. "The colonel's intention is to concentrate his force and stand on the defensive until Stewart comes to our aid; but I fear the detachments are so scattered that they will be cut off in detail."

"I agree with you, major," said Holroyd. "However, we must await Macleod's arrival, and if attacked, make the best defence we can."

We then formed square with Vogelsang's men, the two field-pieces being placed in the centre, and calmly awaited the arrival of Macleod with the other divisions, or the onslaught of the enemy, whichever should come first. Our combined force numbered about two hundred and fifty bayonets, besides officers and artillerymen.

Although the enemy kept up his threatening attitude, we were not seriously attacked; but it was evident, from the sound of heavy firing on both our flanks, that Macleod, and Vogelsang's party which he had left to cover his retreat, were having a very warm time of it. We became terribly anxious about them, and would have given worlds to know how they fared. Unfortunately we could only hear, not see the fighting; for the country around us was like a sandy sea, broken up, so to speak, into waves, or

undulating mounds, not one of which was so sufficiently elevated as to afford a commanding view from its summit over the rest.

In a short time the firing in the direction of the spot where we knew Vogelsang's covering party was battling against terrible odds, began to slacken, then it suddenly ceased. We looked at one another in horror, for no one could doubt that our gallant comrades of De Rolle's must have been overwhelmed.

"My poor fellows!" groaned Major Vogelsang, the tears streaming down his rugged cheeks; "they must have perished to a man. Would that the Highland colonel had permitted me to remain with them!"

Our attention was now attracted by a triumphant shout, and another body of the enemy appeared in sight, racing to join their comrades, "as if Ould Nick were at their heels," as Paddy Cantillon observed.

"Steady, flankers of the 35th!" cried Holroyd; "it's our turn now! Meet them firmly, and, if needs must, let us die like British soldiers for the honour of the old regiment!"

"Faith, an' we're ready to do that, your honour!" answered Sergeant Finnigan. "Shure, divil a one of thim howlin' haythins shall—" The gallant old fellow never finished the sentence, for at that moment a score of the bolder horsemen charged up to within pistol-shot of the square, and discharged their carbines at us.

They, I have no doubt, fired at random, but chance shots often do most harm—one "bullet found its billet," and lodged in the brain of poor Michael Finnigan.

A cry of rage burst from our men, for the sergeant was a general favourite in the light company, and several of the younger hands returned the fire without orders, emptying half-a-dozen saddles, and sending the bold Turks scampering back.

"Steady, light company!" cried Holroyd angrily. "What are those men thinking about? Our chance is a

poor one if you're going to lose your heads like this! Reload, lads, and don't fire again without orders."

"Good, Captain Holroyd!" said Major Vogelsang. "Steadiness is everything! Ha! they are advancing again—down the front ranks!" Instantly the order was obeyed: down on the knee dropped the front ranks; while the rear ranks came to the "recover," and stood as motionless as if on an inspection parade.

We now beheld three separate columns of horsemen, each equal, in point of numbers, to our little force, moving rapidly towards us, one column leading, the others in rear. As they drew nearer, the rear columns edged off to their right and left, sweeping round so as to threaten the right and left faces of our square.

Major Vogelsang now ordered the artillery to unlimber, and bring their two guns into action, right and left; the centre sections of the right and left faces being warned to fall back, so as to leave an opening for the guns, as soon as the word was given.

On came the enemy until they were within about three hundred yards of the square, when all three columns drew rein, as if to breathe their horses.

"Now is your time, lieutenant!" said Vogelsang to the artillery officer. "Fall back the centre sections!"

Quick as lightning our gunners ran up and laid their pieces. "Fire!" shouted their officer, and plump went the six-pound shells into the columns on our right and left, bursting well in the centre, and killing or disabling several men and horses.

We gave a ringing cheer as the gunners coolly sponged out and reloaded the guns, for our foes were thrown into great confusion, and we all thought they would beat a precipitate retreat.

"The guns are loaded, sir," said the artillery subaltern; "shall I give them another dose before they're out of range?"

But the words had hardly been spoken, when the Turkish horsemen wheeled round and charged down upon us, with shrill cries of "*La la ha il Allah ! Vras ! Vras !*"¹

Again the six-pounders were fired ; then the centre sections closed up, and the moment the Turks got within musket-range, our standing ranks gave them a rattling volley, which knocked over several of them, including one of their boldest leaders. This warm reception damped their ardour, and once more they retired in confusion.

We young hands thought the day was our own, and rent the air with cheers ; some of the men even sprang forward as if to start in pursuit of the retreating horse-men ; but the stern voice of the veteran major quickly recalled us to our senses.

Vogelsang now ordered the gunners to load, "to the muzzle," with grape and canister, and the infantry to drop a running ball into their muskets. "We will give them a still warmer welcome, my children !" he exclaimed, with a laugh like the croak of a raven ; "but you must be steady, and not break your ranks."

Once again the turbaned warriors advanced to the attack, yelling like a pack of fiends. A well-directed volley of double-shotted musketry greeted them, yet they paused not in their wild career. Then the six-pounders opened on the columns attacking our right and left faces, and their salutation no mortal Turk could have withstood. The havoc produced as the grape and canister tore through the serried ranks was fearful, and with a cry of dismay the assailants of the right and left sides of our square galloped off *ventre à terre*.

The third body of the enemy, however, undismayed by the repulse of their comrades, held on their course, and charged right up to the rear face of the square, where we were posted ; almost up to our bayonets' points they

¹ "There is no god but God ! Kill ! Kill !"



“Our standing ranks gave them a rattling volley.”

rode, and discharged their pistols, and launched their javelins at us, killing and wounding several of our men. For a moment I feared the square would be broken ; but our rear rank had reloaded, and a second volley sent the enemy to the right-about. Then we glanced around, and saw that seven or eight of our men had been killed or wounded.

CHAPTER VII

DEATH OF COLONEL MACLEOD — APPEARANCE OF THE
MAMELUKES — THE LAST STAND — WOUNDED AND A
PRISONER — A FRIEND IN NEED — "ALL'S WELL THAT
ENDS WELL"

WHILE watching the movements and repelling the attacks of the Turkish horsemen, we had, I fear, given little thought to Macleod's division ; but now we had a moment's breathing time, we remembered our comrades, and became doubly anxious as to their fate. Heavy firing was still to be heard to the right, and as we strained our ears it became evident that the sound was drawing nearer.

"Be the powers ! they're fighting their way towards us," exclaimed Cantillon.

"There's no doubt of it," said Holroyd, after listening intently for a moment.

"I wish we could get a look at them," Major Vogel-sang added.

"See yonder mound, major ?" said Paddy ; "'tis a thrifle higher than the rest. I'm the tallest man among ye, and maybe, if ye'll let me slip out, I could get a peep at them. Sorra a bit of danger, major dear. I'll take Corporal Jones with me ;" and without waiting for permission, he called to the corporal to follow him, and slipped out of the square.

The mound was less than a hundred yards distant.

On reaching the summit, Cantillon sprang on the corporal's shoulders—Jones was a very powerful, athletic man—and stood upright. From this coign of vantage he gazed intently in the direction of the firing; while we watched him anxiously, fearing lest he should be shot by some lurking foe.

Presently Cantillon gave a shout, and jumping down, ran back at full speed, followed by Corporal Jones.

"They're close at hand," he cried as he came up to the square, "fighting like devils. We must go to their assistance, major, and join forces, if possible."

"Are they broken?" asked Vogelsang.

"Divil a bit, sir," was the reply; "but they're attacked on all sides by ten times their number, and the haythlins who have been hammering at us are now having——"

"That's enough," interrupted the major; "it is plain there is no time to lose. Put the wounded on the limbers and waggons, and we will move at once."

We hastened to carry out the major's orders; but closer and closer drew the tide of battle, and ere we could put the square in motion, Macleod's little band of heroes appeared in sight. Alas! a fatal change had occurred. The division was no longer in solid order, as when seen by Cantillon, but broken up into small parties and groups, each fighting desperately against overwhelming numbers of Turkish cavalry and Albanian infantry.

To rush to their rescue was our first impulse; but Vogelsang restrained us, pointing out that we could not possibly render our brave comrades any effectual aid, and that once we broke our formation we should infallibly be cut to pieces. We did what little lay in our power, firing at the enemy whenever we could do so without injury to our own people; and a section of our company sallying out, at a critical moment, under Holroyd and Cantillon, succeeded in bringing Captain Mackay and a few of the 78th into the square.

With the exception of this slender party, Macleod's division was destroyed, not a man escaping. The gallant Macleod fell, as became him, claymore in hand, in the midst of his Highlanders, who, with the devotion of clansmen for their chief, threw themselves in the way of certain destruction in their vain attempts to save him.

While this terrible scene was taking place we were not molested by the enemy ; but, the other divisions destroyed, they now combined their forces against us. The Albanian infantry commenced the attack by lining the sand ridges and pouring a furious fusillade upon the square, the horsemen keeping out of range, ready to sweep down upon us when the right moment arrived. The Albanians were expert marksmen, and their fire proved very disastrous to us. Vogelsang, Holroyd, and Cantillon were amongst the first wounded, the latter severely, and many of our men fell to rise no more. We replied with the six-pounders, as well as with musketry ; but the Albanians being scattered and well covered, our fire was not very effective. To add to our misfortunes, the sun was now beating down upon us with full force, and we had little water to quench our burning thirst ; officers and men were pretty nigh worn out, and we all felt that, unless General Stewart came to our aid, the end must come quickly.

At length, when more than one-third of our number were killed or wounded, there was a cessation of the firing, followed by great commotion amongst the enemy's cavalry. We jumped to the conclusion that, at last, Stewart must have arrived, and our drooping spirits revived. Alas ! we were speedily undeceived ; for as the smoke cleared away, there appeared in sight a large body of Arab horsemen, advancing in loose, but not disorderly array. That the new-comers were foes, not friends, we could not doubt, for as they advanced across the plain the Turkish host welcomed them with a mighty shout and waving of flags.

Though faint from loss of blood, Major Vogelsang still

retained command, and he now mounted a limber-box and examined the advancing troops through his glass.

"They are the Mamelukes!" he exclaimed, "and Mohammed Ali himself is at their head. My men, we have now nothing to do but to sell our lives dearly."

"Possibly they have come to our aid," I suggested, hoping against hope. "Are you sure the Vizier is with them?"

Vogelsang shook his head sadly, and replied that he recognised Mohammed Ali, having seen him before; his presence with the Mamelukes was sufficient to prove that they had come, not as allies, but as our most formidable enemies.

We rapidly made preparations for the struggle before us. The wounded—at least those who were totally disabled from taking part in the defence—were placed in a trench hastily made in the sand; the six-pounders were loaded with grape and with musket-balls to the very muzzle; and each soldier dropped over his cartridge, not only a running ball, but three or four slugs.

The attack was not long delayed, and opened with a renewal of the musketry fire by the Albanians. This lasted for the best part of an hour, and wrought us great mischief. Suddenly it ceased, and the Albanians leisurely retired. Then, with lightning speed, the Mamelukes bore down on our sadly-diminished square.

"Keep steady, men," cried Vogelsang, "and reserve your fire until your foes are within forty yards. Then give them a volley, and load again."

The Mamelukes came on in somewhat loose order, their line extending to, perhaps, twice the width of the square. We let them approach to within thirty yards; then both guns and muskets opened on them with terrible effect. The charge was arrested; and before they could retire out of range, we gave them a second volley only less destructive than the first. Then they galloped away

in confusion. Before we had time to congratulate ourselves, the Albanians again came to the front, and annoyed us with their fire.

After a while the Mamelukes made a second attempt to break our square, only to retire discomfited. Three times did our slender band repulse these magnificent horsemen, inflicting heavy punishment on each occasion ; but after each repulse the Albanians renewed their galling



"I dropped senseless to the ground."

fire, doing us, in proportion, more harm than we did to the Mamelukes.

After the third attack, and while the Albanians were firing at us, the artillery officer reported that only one charge per gun was left.

"We must break up a cask of small-arm ammunition, and make the best use we can of that," replied Major Vogelsang. "You, sir," he added, turning to me, "take

a couple of men, and collect the rounds from the cartouch-boxes of the slain."

I was about to execute this gruesome order, when a bullet, glancing from one of the guns, struck me on the head, and I dropped senseless to the ground.

.

When consciousness returned I found myself lying in the arms of Corporal Jones, who was bathing my head with muddy water. All sound of strife had ceased, and our men were sitting or standing around, disarmed. Several Mamelukes were stalking about with a triumphant air, and in the distance was assembled the Vizier's army. I asked the corporal what had happened.

"We're prisoners, Mr. Cotton, the few of us that's left," he replied. "We hadn't a blessed cartridge left, when a Turkish officer came up with a flag of truce, and told the captain as how our lives should be spared if we surrendered."

"Do you mean Captain Holroyd?"

"Yes, sir. The furrin major was knocked over just after you was, and, though badly hurt, our captain took command. There he is yonder, talking to the officer to whom we surrendered. The rum thing is," continued Corporal Jones, "that the Turkish oficer aint a Turk at all, but a Frenchman. D'you remember, sir, the French lieutenant as used to come so often to your quarters when we lay at Messina?"

"Not M'sieur de Vignes?" I exclaimed.

"That's the name, sir. Well, he's the oficer I'm tellin' you about—and here he comes!"

I looked up and saw a Mameluke approaching, whose rich attire bespoke him an officer of rank. Leaning on his arm was Charlie Holroyd, his head and shoulder bandaged.

"Tom," said Holroyd, in a faint voice, "here is an

old friend—one who has indeed proved a friend in need. It is to M'sieur de Vignes we owe our lives."

"*Pouf!*" cried the Mameluke, whom I at once recognised as my former acquaintance; "I have but repaid the debt I owed you, *mon ami*. When last we met I played you a scurvy trick, and happy am I to be able to make some reparation." And with that he embraced me, much to the horror of Corporal Jones.

Holroyd then told me how, struck with admiration at our heroic defence, M. Drovetti, the French consul-general at Cairo (who had accompanied the Turkish army), had induced the Vizier to offer us quarter. De Vignes was selected to bear the flag of truce, and recognising Holroyd, persuaded him to surrender. In spite of our surrender, the Mamelukes, furious at the losses they had sustained, attempted to massacre the survivors of our force, and were only prevented by the exertions of Eugene de Vignes, who saved our lives at the risk of his own. As it was, several of our wounded were butchered; amongst others, poor Paddy Cantillon.

Naturally I was curious to learn how the French lieutenant had been transformed into an officer of Mamelukes, and that evening I asked him to tell me his story.

"*Mais certainement, mon cher,*" he replied. "At Messina I met, and fell in love with, the lady who is now my wife. Her father, Prince T——, objecting to my attentions, sent his daughter to the convent. By bribing one of the lay-sisters, I obtained an interview, and persuaded Beatrice to elope with me. To return to France would have been difficult, if not impossible, so I determined to fly to Egypt, where my mother's brother, M'sieur Drovetti, was consul-general. I hired a small coasting-vessel, and made all arrangements for our flight. On the appointed night I repaired to the convent. With the assistance of the lay-sister, Beatrice effected her escape from the building, and joined me outside the walls. But somehow her father had

got wind of the affair—I believe the lay-sister betrayed us—and while making off, we were attacked by four of his servants. I had just time to tell Beatrice to fly up the road, conceal herself, and await events, whilst I covered her retreat. Happily my assailants—probably acting on their master's orders—were so intent upon killing me, that they did not attempt to follow her. You, *mon ami*, came to my aid, and the fellows ran off, leaving one of their number with my sword through his heart. To get rid of you, I pretended the rascal was only wounded, and sent you off for assistance. The moment you had gone, I picked the dead body up, carried it a few yards, and threw it in a ditch. Then I rejoined Beatrice, and we hastened to the boat which was awaiting us. In the end we got safely to Cairo, and were married by my good uncle's chaplain. Through my uncle's influence, I was appointed an officer in the Vizier's service, and am now in high favour. *Voilà tout !*"

My story is finished. We were carried prisoners to Cairo, but, thanks to the influence of M. Drovetti, were allowed to take up our quarters with Eugene de Vignes and his charming wife ; thus escaping the hardships and indignities which, as we afterwards learned, many of our fellow-prisoners suffered.

In due course we were exchanged, and rejoined our regiment. Many years have passed since then. My brother-in-law, Charles Holroyd, is a general and a K.C.B. ; I have long ago left the army, and settled down to a country life ; but we still retain a vivid recollection of the "Disaster of El Hamet," and tell our children the story of "a Frenchman's Gratitude."

THE BADGE OF THE FOURTH FOOT

By ROBERT LEIGHTON

I

“**W**HAT a night ! What a wild, wild night !” Old Donald Leslie lifted his grizzled head, closed his book on his gnarled forefinger, and listened to the low deep sougling of the wind. As he spoke, a gust of smoke blew out into the room from the wide throat of the chimney ; the flames of the burning logs on the open hearth leapt and crackled anew ; the lights of the hanging cruse lamps flickered, and the grimy arras hangings over the doors and windows swung heavily to and fro and swelled out like the sails of a ship.

“Ay ; it’s from the north,” muttered Elspeth Macdonald, as she crossed to one of the deep embayed windows and drew aside the curtain to peer out into the night. “It will be bringing snow with it. The clouds were banked up like great mountains in the north when I looked out in the forenoon, and the shepherd was telling me that he saw a white bonnet on Ben Bhuidhe as he came west over Culloden braes yestreen.”

“Listen !” cried young Colin Leslie, releasing the cat from his knee and rising to his feet. “Did you not hear something, grandfather ?”

“Well did I hear something,” returned the old man. “I’ve heard it these two hours past. It’s the wind howling in the vent.”

“Nay, but it wasna the wind,” pursued the boy. “It was——”

"Just hold your tongue, laddie, and let me get reading my book," interrupted the grandfather petulantly. "You're aye putting in your word. A body can do no reading with such chatter for ever dinging in his ears."

"There it is again!" cried Colin, not heeding the old man's complaint. "It was some one hammering at the castle door."

"Hoots, bairn. Who would be out travelling and knocking at folk's doors on a night like this?"

Colin approached the hearth and leaned his arm against the cheek of the chimney, staring into the glowing fire.

"It was some one on horseback," said he; "I heard the horse's hoofs on the stones just before you said 'What a night it is!'"

Sir Donald Leslie continued reading under the dim light of the lamp that hung above his head. Presently Elspeth Macdonald left the room on tiptoe, closing the door behind her. Colin applied himself to casting a new log upon the fire. Regardless of his grandfather, he began to whistle the lightsome air of a certain Jacobite song. Soon his whistling changed into the song itself and he chanted, half under his breath, the words—

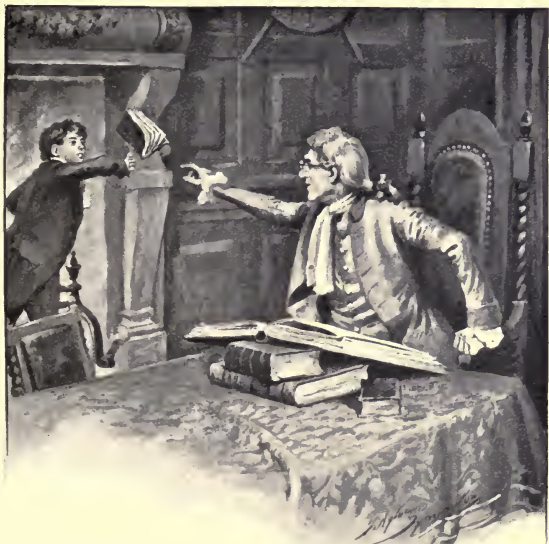
"Oh, Charlie is my darling,
My darling, my darling,
Charlie is my darling,
The young Chevalier."

Suddenly a fluttering book flew past his curly head.

"How dare you? How dare you sing that accursed Jacobite song in my hearing?" cried his grandfather, red with rage. "Have I not told you a hundred times that I'll have none of your rebel rantings in my house?"

"I meant no harm, grandfather," said Colin, picking up the book and placing it on the corner of the table near the old man's elbow, "I was not thinking of the meaning of the words."

"May-be not, may-be not," returned Sir Donald, as he idly took up his book. Then, calming himself, he added more softly, shaking his head the while: "Colin, you are just the very reflection of my brother Neil. My father



"Suddenly a fluttering book flew past his curly head."

had exactly the same trouble with him in the Forty-Five that I have with you in these more peaceful days. You try to persuade me that you have no real sympathy with the wild adventurer you were now singing about. But

I'll be bound that if there were another rising (which Heaven forbend!) you'd on with the kilt and be off with another Stuart, just as Neil Leslie went off with the young Pretender—luckless loon that he was. But I'll not have it, look you. I'll have none of your Jacobite thoughts here; no, not even so much as the whistling of their inflammatory tunes!"

Colin raised his eyes and glanced furtively at the old claymore that was suspended over the door, crossed by a rusty Lochaber axe. One might have seen by the sudden gleam in his blue eyes that the lad had some lingering sympathy with the romantic adventurer of whose lost cause his grandfather had spoken so contemptuously.

"One rebel in the family has been quite enough, and more than enough," went on Sir Donald. "But for Neil Leslie we might now be living in comfort and luxury instead of in poverty. We now feed upon porridge and oaten bannocks instead of good wholesome beef and venison; we drink weak milk instead of wine. Our dwelling is a poor broken-down ruin instead of, as it once was, a lordly castle fit for a king. Look at our lands; they are wide, but they bear no harvest, for we cannot afford to cultivate them. Our stables are empty; our flocks have been reduced to a few skinny sheep that find no food upon the barren ground. Even the grouse and the plovers have deserted us. And it is all the work of Neil Leslie. My very blood simmers when I think of him, the rebel rascal! the scoundrel! the thief!"

"Thief?" echoed Colin quickly. "Thief, grandfather?"

"Ay, thief," growled the old man in an angrier tone. "He robbed his own father—*my* father. All the hard-earned and hard-saved money that my father had put aside for his descendants—for me as his eldest son, and for you in your turn, although that was long, long before you were born—was stolen by Neil Leslie, and by him

appropriated to the accursed cause of the man whom he called his prince. Prince? A prince of rascals, a prince of gallows-birds; that is what I call the frog-eating reprobate that presumed to lay claim to the British throne. What did he do—this Charles Edward Stuart? He filled the silly heads of our men and women with his romantic tomfoolery; he turned all Scotland topsy-turvy and left it a miserable wreck of its former and better self——Don't look like that at me, Colin. I'm telling you nothing but the simple truth. And when you are a little older and get the hayseed out of your hair, you will know the wisdom of being loyal to your rightful king. There, I've lost my place in the book, now. Let me see; what page was I at?"

The door opened while the old man peevishly turned over the pages, and Elspeth Macdonald entered. There was an expression of anxious concern in her wrinkled face. She approached the master of Castle Leslie and mysteriously whispered into his ear.

Sir Donald gripped the wooden arm of his high-backed chair.

"Ossington?" he said questioningly, repeating the name that the housekeeper had announced. "Colonel Ossington? I know no such name. Who can the man be, think you, Elspeth?"

Elspeth shook her head.

"That's mair than I can tell," said she. "He just asked for the master as he stamped his snowy boots on the step. Then he took off his cloak and handed it to Geordie, as bold as you please, and bade me give you his name—Colonel Ossington."

"Has he left his horse standing there?" questioned Sir Donald.

Elspeth crossed her hands in front of her, and holding up her head in high dignity, answered—

"No. The beast has been taken round to the stables."

"H'm," muttered Sir Donald. "He evidently intends to stay the night, then. Well, it matters little who he may be. We couldna send a body away from the very door on a night of storm like this, even if he were but a mere gaberlunzie. Let him come ben here. And see that some supper is sent in. Wait," he added, as Elspeth was moving away; "see that Andrew gets some food for the horse. There should be a handful of oats left in the corners of the bags up in the old loft; and if not, he'll may-be find some dry hay in the byre."

"Toots!" objected Elspeth, as she swept towards the door, "there's no need to fash yourself about the horse. Andrew will see to the beast. Trust him to that."

Young Colin Leslie stood before the fire with his face fronting to the room. His grandfather's knotted fingers nervously turned the faded brown leaves of his book, while the wind groaned in the chimney and the fitful flames of the fire cast strange moving shadows about the gloomy room.

The man who presently entered crossed the oaken floor with a somewhat halting gait. His spurs jangled at each step. His clean-shaven face was thin and pinched, but ruddy in contrast with his silvery hair. As he approached into the light of the fire, Colin noticed that his active grey eyes were conspicuously clear and bright beneath his furrowed brow. He wore a snuff-coloured riding-coat, with breeches of the same colour, and long military boots. A diamond glistened amid the pure whiteness of his lace-edged cravat.

Sir Donald Leslie rose from his chair and advanced a step to meet him. The two men bowed to each other as strangers.

"You are welcome, sir," said Sir Donald, standing upright with his right hand on the tall back of his chair. "Pray take this seat near the fire. The night is cold, and it may be you have travelled far."

The soldier bent his head courteously.

"Not farther than Inverness," was his response. He spoke in a distinctly English tone of voice, which Sir Donald at once detected.

"You are from the South?" he questioned. And then, before before the stranger had time to answer, he added, "Colonel Ottington, I think my housekeeper told me, is your name?"

"Ossington," corrected the stranger, seating himself and holding his long, delicate hands in front of the fire. "Colonel Ossington, late of the King's 17th Light Dragoons. I am newly returned from Canada." He glanced at his host as he spoke, and after a slight pause continued, wrinkling his face into a half smile, "You do not appear to know me, sir? Am I not addressing Mr. Alan Leslie—Alan Leslie, once of the 20th Foot?"

There was a moment or two of silence, broken only by the deep-throated growling of the wind in the chimney-vent. Colin Leslie, who had retired to a shadowed corner of the ingle-nook, looked at his grandfather, wondering at his hesitation.

"My name is Donald Leslie," came at last the gloomy reply. "I am a brother of Alan Leslie, and the eldest son of Sir John Leslie, who died fifty years ago—fifty years almost to the very day."

Colonel Ossington meditatively nodded his head.

"That would be in the year of Culloden, I think," said he. "He was for the young——" He checked himself.

"No," broke in Sir Donald vehemently. "He was certainly not for the young Pretender."

The colonel raised his eyebrows in apparent surprise, dropped his open hands upon his knees, and slowly rose to his feet.

"I had almost expected to hear you say the young Chevalier," he said, with a fuller frankness than he had

hitherto shown. "I had understood that your brother Alan was the only member of your family who was not heart and soul for the Stuarts."

"On the contrary," corrected Sir Donald, "I and my brother Alan and our father were always staunch for King George. Ah," he added, seeing the door open, "here is some supper. I am afraid it will prove a poor meal; but pray make yourself free with such as there is. Pardon me if I leave you for a little while. My grandson Colin, here, will entertain you in the meantime." He poured a few drops of whisky into a glass, and dealt similarly but more generously with a glass which he passed to his guest. "To the King!" he said, moistening his lips.

"To the King!" responded Colonel Ossington, bowing politely to Sir Donald as he left the room.

The supper which had been set before the stranger was, as his host had expressed it, but a poor meal; but Colonel Ossington partook of it with as much enjoyment as if it had been a banquet. Presently Colin Leslie emerged from his corner by the ingle and slowly approached the table, standing opposite to the colonel as he ate. The boy's fingers played idly with the ragged fringe of the table-cloth; but now and again he stole a furtive glance at the silver-haired officer at the other side. Once or twice he attempted to speak, but his shyness overcame him. It was not often that he encountered a stranger such as the man before him. At last he mustered courage enough to say—

"Are you a soldier—a real soldier?"

The colonel smiled at him. "Yes," said he, "I am a soldier. Is that something strange to you?"

"We don't see many soldiers in these parts," said the boy. "There are some at Inverness, of course, and at Fort George, but I've never been to either of those places. Once when I went to Edinburgh with my father, I saw

some soldiers at the Castle. But I never spoke to one before."

"Is your father at home—here in Castle Leslie?" asked Colonel Ossington.

"No," answered Colin; "he's dead. So is my mother. Grandfather and I are quite alone in the world." He hesitated, almost ashamed of having said so much. Presently he looked up once more and added, "Where is your red coat and your sword? I thought soldiers always wore red coats and swords."

"Mine are at home in England," explained the soldier. "I don't wear them now. I have not worn them at all since I came back from America. I am too old."

Colin reflected for some moments, leaning his elbows on the table and his chin in his supporting hands.

"Did you ever kill a man?" he asked abruptly.

"Yes; many men. That is what soldiers are meant to do. But one doesn't like to think of them as men. Somehow it seems different when one calls them simply the enemy."

"Then you've been in a real battle?"

The soldier nodded.

"That must have been very exciting," remarked Colin, with boyish enthusiasm. "I should like to be in a real battle—that is, if it were against Frenchmen, or Spaniards, or blackamoors, or people of that sort. I don't think I'd like it so much if they were Britons."

"I suppose not," agreed Colonel Ossington, with a sigh. "Somehow it does seem to make a difference."

"Once," went on Colin, growing more communicative now that he had discovered a soldier to be very little different in human nature from any other man—"once, there was a battle near here—near this castle, I mean—over on Culloden Moor, where our sheep pastures are. And last spring, when Peter Reid of the Mains of Kilravock was ploughing, he turned up a rusty old claymore. He

gave it to me, and I polished it. There it is, hanging up with that Lochaber axe upon the wall.

Colonel Ossington moved his chair to look round at the old sword. His glance travelled to other parts of



“Turned up a rusty old claymore.”

the dimly lighted room, surveying the few family portraits in their tarnished frames, the dusty antlered heads of stags, the old Highland targets, crossbows, and battle-axes that decorated the dark oak panels of the walls.

“There used to be a rack of muskets in that farther

corner," he remarked. "And where is the portrait of the beautiful Lady Leslie—Bonnie Belinda, they called her—that used to hang up there above that carved settle?"

"Oh, that has been put away," explained Colin, "because—because Lady Belinda was a Jacobite, you know. But how did you know that the picture and the guns and things were ever there? You have never been in this room before, have you?"

The colonel raised his glass to his lips. "Yes," he said.

"When?" demanded Colin.

"Oh, when I was a youth, a little older than you are now. It must be fifty years ago."

At this moment Sir Donald Leslie re-entered the room.

"Grandfather!" cried Colin, "Colonel Ossington has been here before! He was here fifty years ago."

Sir Donald turned sharply to his guest.

"Is this true?" he asked.

"Quite true," responded the old campaigner. "I was here in the year 1746. You, I think, were at that time abroad."

"Yes," acquiesced Sir Donald. "I was in Leyden. I am sorry you did not inform me at once that this was not your first visit. I should have given you a warmer welcome if I had known. As it is, I have treated you as a stranger, and have not even offered you my hand."

"It is hardly too late to repair the omission," said Colonel Ossington, and he thrust forth his hand, which his host grasped.

"Ossington?" muttered Sir Donald, trying to recall the name. "Ossington? Dear me, I'm afraid I must seem very stupid. But for the life of me I cannot remember to have heard of you. If I may be so inquisitive, what was the occasion of your former visit, colonel?"

"I will tell you," returned the soldier frankly. "In-

deed, my present appearance here is wholly on account of what occurred at that long distant time." He put his hand to his breast pocket. "May I smoke?" he asked.

"Certainly," said Sir Donald. "I am afraid, however, that I cannot offer you any tobacco. We can ill afford such a luxury in these hard times."

"Thank you. I have some very fine American tobacco with me," rejoined the colonel. "Ah, I forgot," he added. "I find I have left it in my saddle-bag."

"Colin will fetch it," urged Sir Donald, anticipating the promised pleasure of renewing a habit which economy alone had compelled him to abandon.

"Oh, don't trouble," said his guest, "I will go myself. I think I remember where the stable is situated. Although perhaps the lad might, after all, accompany me."

Colin was already at the door, prepared for the guest. He conducted the colonel out into the hall, where they got their hats and a lantern, and then through the house and out by one of the back doors, and into the spacious, wind-swept garden, along by a high blank wall and across to the stable. By the aid of Colin's lamp, the colonel soon found his tobacco and, giving a caressing pat to his horse's flanks, he followed the boy back into the garden.

A wild gust of wind met them as they came out from the stable door, extinguishing their light. The snow had ceased to fall, and the sky was clear, saving only for a few fleecy white clouds that drifted southward across the moon. The ruined and ivy-covered walls of the older parts of the castle stood out black against the steel-blue brightness of the sky. An owl flew with silent wings from out the ruins and disappeared among the tall bare trees that creaked and groaned in the wind at the rear of the keep.

Colin walked in advance over the crisp white snow.

Suddenly he drew back with a half-smothered cry, gripped his companion's arm, and pointed with agitated finger into the dark shadows of the ruined walls.

"Look!" he ejaculated, trembling in every limb. "Do you see it? Do you see it? See! there it goes—there, in at the old postern gate! Come! come quickly back to the house. I'm afraid!"

Colonel Ossington held the lad's arm, supporting him.

"Afraid of what, boy?" he demanded. "There is nothing."

"Did you not see it?" gasped Colin, in a mysterious, scarcely audible whisper. "It went in at the postern, there."

"I saw nothing to alarm you to this degree, my boy," returned the soldier. "What was it? Tell me what it was!"

Colin's fingers crept down the colonel's right arm until they grasped his hand. The lad had implored his companion to return with him to the house, but he himself now stood still as if rooted to the spot.

"What was it?" repeated Colonel Ossington.

Colin answered in the same low, mysterious whisper. "It was the ghost—the ghost of Neil Leslie. It is often seen here. Elspeth has seen it. So has grandfather. I have seen it before, too; but never so plainly as now. It glided along there by the wall, with its plaid wrapped round it. I saw the yellow stone glistening in the hilt of its dirk. Its sword flashed in the moonlight. When it got to the gate it stopped a moment and put out its hand, holding something—something that looked like a little bag. It turned its face this way and then disappeared."

"Come," said the colonel, putting his arm about the lad and drawing him onward towards the house. "Your imagination has been playing you some trick. It was the moonlight and the moving bushes, perhaps. You will forget all about it when we get indoors."

As they passed by the postern gate, Colin craned round and peered within. Seeing nothing but black darkness, he heaved a deep sigh of relief and walked boldly on, saying nothing until he had closed and barred the door behind him. Then, touching Colonel Ossington's arm, he said calmly—

"Please say nothing to grandfather about Neil's ghost, Colonel Ossington. It would only disturb him."

II

SIR DONALD LESLIE was engaged in preparing a bowl of hot whisky toddy, when his grandson and his guest rejoined him. He did not observe Colin's blanched face and wild, staring eyes. The boy strode to the fireplace and flung himself into his favourite seat in the corner, staring into the glowing red mass upon the hearth.

When the two men had filled and lighted their pipes, and were comfortably seated before the fire, each with a steaming glass of toddy within reach of him, Colonel Ossington abruptly resumed the conversation at the point where it had been broken off some fifteen minutes earlier.

"My present appearance here," he said, crossing his legs, "is connected with certain mysterious events which occurred at the time of my first visit to Castle Leslie on the fifteenth day of April 1746—that is to say, on the eve of the battle of Culloden." He paused an instant as if to arrange his thoughts. Then, leaning forward and fixing his keen grey eyes upon his host, he said in a tone of sharp inquiry: "Will you tell me what became of your brother, Neil Leslie?"

Sir Donald received the question with a lowering of the brows.

"Ah," said he, as he pressed his finger into the bowl of his tobacco-pipe, "I had guessed that it was of him

you came to speak. I had even gone so far as to expect that you were about to pester me by telling me you had met him out there in America. I don't want to know anything concerning him, Colonel Ossington. He disgraced and ruined his family, and whether he be dead, as I hope, or alive, as I sometimes fear, he is no more to me than the most utter stranger."

"If I had met him in America," observed Colonel Ossington, "I should have no need to ask you what had become of him. I know nothing of him—nothing of what happened to him subsequent to the evening before Culloden fight."

"I assume that you were yourself in that fight," remarked Sir Donald.

"Yes," returned the colonel, "I was then a young ensign. I served under Major James Wolfe in repelling the first attack of the Highlanders."

"Ah," mused Sir Donald; "then you would not come into conflict with Neil Leslie. He, I believe, remained studiously in the rear."

"Pardon me," corrected the colonel, "he was not on the field."

A blank yet somewhat haughty stare was the response to this unexpected contradiction. Sir Donald was evidently perplexed.

"I do not go so far as to declare that he was actually in the fight," said he. "But that he was somewhere on the fringe of the battle I am well assured. After the fight he fled with the defeated Highlanders, first to the Western Islands, and afterwards to France. Such at least is what my father believed concerning him—not that he went out of his way to make inquiries. You may be sure that he was in nowise anxious for the graceless scoundrel's safety. Indeed, if the truth must needs be told, Sir John was rejoiced to be rid of Neil at any cost."

"Rejoiced to be rid of him?" echoed the colonel, in surprise. "I do not understand. Neil Leslie was his father's especial favourite. And very naturally so, as it seems to me, since they both were Jacobites."

Sir Donald laid his pipe upon the table.

"Jacobites?" he repeated, in a tone half of surprise and half of disbelief. "Who were Jacobites?"

"Why, Sir John Leslie and his son Neil."

"No, no," returned Sir Donald emphatically. "You mistake the facts, colonel; you are dreaming. My brother Neil was a Jacobite, curse him. But my father, I thank Heaven, was as firmly for the House of Hanover as you or I."

"If either of us is dreaming," declared the soldier, "I am afraid it is yourself, Sir Donald. Surely you do not pretend that you never knew your father to be a bitter enemy of King George! Surely you, his own son, cannot be ignorant of the fact that for months—ay, for years—before Culloden, Sir John Leslie was secretly one of the most active friends and personal supporters of the young Pretender?"

Sir Donald had risen to his feet, and now he strode thoughtfully to the end of the room and back.

"If you are speaking the truth, I have been ignorant indeed," he said, with a frown. He turned and continued moodily to pace the room. To and fro he strode with his twitching hands linked together behind his back. Colonel Ossington quietly puffed at his pipe, while young Colin Leslie, in his seat at the ingle, leaned forward staring at the two men in fixed attention. No word was spoken for many minutes, and all was silent saving only for the wild, boisterous rumbling of the wind in the chimney, and the regular shuffling tramp of Sir Donald Leslie's slippered feet upon the bare oak floor. Presently this latter sound ceased, and Sir Donald stood still, ruminating.

"I cannot believe it," he said at length, confronting

Colonel Ossington. "On what grounds do you base your conviction?"

"On the surest of all grounds," returned the soldier, "his own admission, and also my certain knowledge that when Charles Edward Stuart and his army of Highlanders were encamped on the moor near here, Sir John Leslie supplied them not only with the food which they so sorely needed, but also with money, with arms, and with ammunition."

A fierce light leapt into the old man's eyes.

"It is false!" he cried, in a quivering voice; "it is false!" He stamped his foot. "I do not doubt that you yourself believe what you are saying. Some knave or liar must have deceived you. But, all the same, it is not true. My father was as fervent a Hanoverian as I was and still am. It was Neil alone who was the skulking Jacobite. Ay, and to him I owe it that I am now so poor that I cannot even offer a chance visitor the hospitality that is his due. Had my father been in sound health at the time of the Rebellion, he would have joined the King's troops and fought as boldly as did my dear brother Alan, who fell fighting bravely and loyally for King George on Culloden Moor."

"In that last particular you are again strangely in error," interrupted Colonel Ossington. "Alan Leslie took no part whatsoever in the battle of Culloden. I, who was his comrade and friend, can testify also that he did not die a soldier's death—at least not upon the field."

"What!" cried the astonished Sir Donald. "Are you certain of this?"

"I am," reiterated the colonel, "absolutely certain."

"Then where in Heaven's name was he?"

"Here—in this house," returned Ossington, knocking the ash out of his pipe and slowly reopening his tobacco-bag. "It was of him more particularly that I came here to speak with you. I wanted to learn something of his

fate, whatever it may have been. But it seems you know as little of it as I do myself. We were companions in arms, he and I. It was while I was stationed in Edinburgh that he joined Major James Wolfe's battalion of the Fourth Foot. I was then a young ensign. Alan and I were quartered together, and we soon became fast friends. We sat at the same mess-table, we shared the same bottle of wine, we smoked the same pipe. When it was a question of fighting, as at Prestonpans, we fought side by side."

Sir Donald filled his guest's glass anew. Colin Leslie continued silently to listen, believing that the old soldier was now coming to something more definite.

"In the spring of '46, you remember," went on the colonel, "the Duke of Cumberland's forces marched northward to Aberdeen, in search of the rebels. From Aberdeen we advanced to the town of Nairn, and while there we heard that the Pretender was concentrating his army of Highlanders at a spot not many miles away from our encampment. Alan Leslie and I were sent out to reconnoitre. We made our way westward and discovered the enemy on Culloden Moor. Believing that we might learn something further as to their intentions, Alan induced me to accompany him to Castle Leslie, in the hope of hearing news from the lad's father, who was supposed, although erroneously, to be friendly to the King. We arrived here at dusk and were admitted into this same room."

The colonel's eyes wandered about the apartment as if in the endeavour to picture it as it had been at that earlier time.

"For some two hours," he continued, "we were left here alone. During that interval of waiting, Alan told me the romantic story of Bonnie Belinda, the story being suggested by her portrait, which hung over yonder above the settle."

Sir Donald nodded and glanced across at the vacant place on the panelled wall.

"But at last," went on the speaker, "Sir John Leslie entered, with his plaid about his shoulders, as if he had newly returned from a journey. He regarded his soldier son with stony indifference."

"'Well?' he demanded; 'what do you want here?'

"'I have come, sir,' stammered Alan, surprised at this cold welcome. 'I have come——'

"His father bent forward with his hand resting on the table at his side, and almost touching Alan's regimental cap with its bright brass badge.

"'You have come as a spy!' he cried bitterly, following up the accusation with a volley of virulent taunts. 'You ingrate!' he cried; 'you weak-kneed renegade! Where is your patriotism? How dare you come here, wearing the uniform of the hateful foreign usurper whom you serve?'"

"He said *that*?" questioned Sir Donald agitatedly. "He—my father—said that?"

Colonel Ossington took up the fire-tongs and caught at a fragment of burning wood with which to light his pipe.

"Those were his own words," said he; "and they were not less surprising to me than they were to Alan Leslie. I do not exactly remember what Alan said in retaliation, but he taunted his father with being a Jacobite, and, as he said, 'the follower of an upstart Pretender'; and at these words Sir John drew himself proudly together and stood at his full height, which I am sure must have been a good six feet. 'I will not have His Royal Highness so named in my presence,' he declared with a frown, and pointing to the door in all the dignity of his old age, he added: 'You are no son of mine, and I do not wish ever to see you again.'

"But even as he spoke, the door was opened from

without, and a tall, singularly noble-looking young man entered with the majestic stride of a monarch. He was followed by a yet younger man. At sight of our red coats both new-comers started back in amazement. Before either could speak, however, Sir John had hurried the elder of them out of the room. The younger man, whom I rightly guessed to be Neil Leslie, stepped back and, looking into Alan's face, smiled in recognition, and held out his hand. Alan refused to accept this offer of friendship."

"Ay, and quite right," interposed Sir Donald.

Colonel Ossington did not heed the interruption, but proceeded with his narrative.

"As the two brothers stood there, facing each other," he said, "I thought them the two handsomest youths I had ever beheld. Alan, with his smart military bearing, his finely featured face and his glistening dark eyes; Neil, somewhat taller, although younger, with fairer hair and more lithe figure, dressed in the picturesque Highland costume, with his dark tartan kilt and his long flowing plaid, that was caught at the shoulder by a large silver brooch, set with a sparkling yellow stone."

On hearing this description of his great-uncle, young Colin Leslie moved from his seat at the fire to a vacant chair opposite to Colonel Ossington. It was evident that Neil was in his eyes a hero.

"Alan, I say, refused to accept his brother's proffered friendship. 'Who was the young man that came to the door with you just now?' he demanded. And Neil answered proudly, as he turned to leave the room: 'It was the prince whom I have the honour to serve—Prince Charles Edward Stuart.'"

"And he was once here—here in this very room?" murmured Colin, with reverent enthusiasm. In his boyish imagination the room had been sanctified by the presence of the romantic adventurer.



“ Alan refused to accept this offer of friendship.

"Continue," urged Sir Donald, with a black cloud in his face. "What happened next?"

"When Neil had gone out of the room," said the old campaigner, "Alan gave a mocking laugh. 'What do you think of them, Jack?' said he. 'It seems to me we've dropped into a hornet's nest. It will be war to the knife with my father and me after this. Which reminds me,' he added, crossing the room to the wall opposite the window there, 'this pretty dirk is mine. I may as well take possession of it.' And he took down a long-bladed, jewel-hafted dagger that was hung there under the picture of Bonnie Belinda. 'Wait outside for me, Jack,' said he; 'wait at the stable door. There's something else I want to do before we go back to Nairn.' So I went out and waited at the stable. I waited for fully an hour. When Alan joined me at last, he was a different man. He was strangely agitated—almost mad with passion and fierce vindictive rage against his father.

"'Look here, Jack,' said he, 'you'd better ride back to Nairn at once—without me. I shall come on later—perhaps not until to-morrow morning. Ride back as quickly as you can, and see the Duke of Cumberland. If you can't see him, go to Major Wolfe. Tell him—tell either of them—that the rebel army is only some four thousand strong, but that the Pretender has determined to attack the King's troops to-morrow. I have just heard this by accident. The three of them—Charles Stuart, my father, and that young scamp Neil—have been closeted together. But I overheard them talking and unfolding their plans. There was only a thin curtain between us, and I heard every word. I heard my father saying that he had a store of arms and ammunition here in the castle for the use of the Highlanders. Two hundred muskets and as many swords, as well as ten thousand pounds in gold. These he offered to Stuart, bidding him send for them at eleven o'clock to-night. The arms and the money

are to be delivered to the messengers by my brother Neil at the postern gate in the castle garden. They *will* be delivered, Jack, if—if I don't prevent it, as I mean to do.'"

Colonel Ossington paused in his narrative. His gaze was fixed upon the earnestly attentive eyes and the white face of Colin Leslie. The boy seemed mentally to be associating this fact of the delivery of arms at the postern gate with the recently seen apparition of Neil Leslie. As for Sir Donald, he had now ceased to doubt Colonel Ossington's affirmations, and was as deeply interested in the narrative as was his grandson, although the sympathies of the two were directly at variance.

"Ten thousand pounds in gold!" ejaculated Sir Donald in astonishment. "Where on earth did it all come from?"

"I do not know," returned Ossington. "Probably it represented the contributions of the wealthy Jacobites of the immediate neighbourhood."

"And did the Highlanders get those guns and things in time to use them in the next day's battle?" Colin ventured to ask. He breathed a sigh of disappointment when Colonel Ossington answered, with more conviction than the mere words implied—

"I believe not. Alan Leslie remained behind with the purpose of frustrating their delivery."

"Ay, and did frustrate it, I'll be bound," interposed the grandfather. "Alan was brave, he was strong and determined. He would stick at nothing! When did you next see him, colonel?"

"I never saw him again," replied Ossington. "Since that night when I left him his fate has been to me a complete mystery. On the next day, at Nairn, when the muster-roll was called, he was absent. We advanced to Culloden, and the battle was fought—if battle it may be called which was a mere rout. But Alan Leslie was nowhere on the field. When the Highlanders had re-

treated, vanquished, and the Duke of Cumberland was pursuing his too terrible vengeance upon the innocent and the guilty alike, I searched among the wounded and the dead for my missing comrade, but nowhere could I find him. Afterwards, I came here. Your castle had been attacked and partly demolished by Hawley's dragoons. Sir John Leslie, I heard, had gone the night before with Charles Stuart to the house of Lord Lovat, to be present at a council of war. He afterwards escaped with the fugitives—probably in company with his son Neil.

"Ay!" added Sir Donald; "and Neil, I'll be bound, did not neglect to carry off the gold with him, and use it for his own selfish purposes; for the Pretender never got the money. I'm thankful for that at least. That he should have it were worse even than that Neil should squander it." The old man began again to stride to and fro across the floor. "Neil was a villain!" he cried; "an ingrain villain and scoundrel. He ought to have been hanged with the rest of them! I could almost be content at the loss of the family fortunes if I might only know that the rascal had died an outlaw's death on the gallows. It was doubtless he who prevented Alan from getting back to his regiment that night."

Colonel Ossington meditated a few moments in silence.

"Yes," he said at length, "no doubt you are right. But in what way did he prevent him, Sir Donald? That is what I want most particularly to know."

"To my mind there is but one answer to that question," returned Sir Donald decisively. "My brother Alan was not in the battle, you say. If he had been alive I am certain he would not have shirked his duty. But I believe he was not alive, colonel; I believe that he was murdered, and murdered by his own brother, Neil Leslie. That also would tally with the fact that since that fatal night, Neil has never dared to show himself at his home."

Colin Leslie here ventured to break in with a remark.

"You have no right to say such a thing, grandfather," he said emphatically. "Why should Neil ever think of murdering Alan? He had nothing to fear from him."

"You know nothing about the matter, boy," growled Sir Donald. "It is no business of an ignorant lad to discuss such a thing as this with his elders."

But Colonel Ossington did not so despise the boy's opinions.

"By the way, Master Colin," said he, "your ghost of this evening should have some bearing on this mystery. Did you not say that the apparition was dressed in the Highland kilt?"

"Ghost!" echoed Sir Donald in astonishment. "What ghost? What apparition?"

"The ghost that I saw to-night when I went out with Colonel Ossington to the stables," returned Colin; "the ghost of Neil Leslie. It went in at the postern gate; the gate where the arms and the money were to have been delivered."

"Ah!" the old man drew his breath in sharply, "I have heard of that ghost before. Old Elspeth has seen it. Once, also," he hesitated, listening to the angry blast of the wind; "once, also, on a wild, blustering night just such as this, I saw it myself. That was many years ago; but, I remember, it was at that same place—near the postern gate. Probably the rascal's guilty conscience troubles him, even in his grave—if, indeed, he be in his grave."

There was a long pause, during which the wind howled even more piteously than before. Colonel Ossington emptied his glass and set it down with deliberate slowness upon the table at his elbow.

"I am persuaded that there was some foul play on that night," said he, in a low, clear voice. "But of course there can now be no proof. How could there be, after

all these years?" He leaned forward with his open hands clasping his knees, and with his eyes fixed upon the fire. Then he went on, as if speaking to himself: "Some years ago, just after the taking of Quebec, I chanced to make the acquaintance of an aged Highlander, who had a bullet in his chest and was dying in the hospital. I learned that the man's name was David Duncan. We got talking of the Jacobite rebellion, and I discovered that he had been present at Culloden. Further conversation elicited the information that this same old Highlander had been one of the Pretender's messengers sent to Castle Leslie to convey the arms and money to the rebel encampment. Duncan and his companions waited that night near the postern gate. They were at their post at eleven. They waited until three o'clock. But no one ever came to them and the arms were never delivered. While they waited, Duncan heard a strange, weird cry, like a cry for help. Whence it came he could not tell; neither did he know whether it was the cry of a man or of a woman. Human it certainly was. It seemed, he said, to come out of the ground at his feet. It was then midnight."

The old clock in the outer hall struck eleven. Sir Donald Leslie signed to Colin, indicating that it was high time the boy was in bed. Colin bade the two men good-night, but still lingered in the room for a few moments, hoping to hear more of this family mystery.

"I infer from what you have said," remarked Colonel Ossington, addressing his host, "that you have no knowledge of the secret place in which the military stores and the gold of which we have been speaking were hidden?"

"There is no such secret place in all the castle," returned Sir Donald. "Of that I am quite certain. Whether the rebels received the stores or not, the things were assuredly removed long before I returned to Scotland."

These were the last arguments that Colin Leslie heard

before he retired to bed. As he lay wakeful on his pillow, he reflected upon the story that had been revealed to him. The men had come to the conclusion that Neil Leslie, the Jacobite, had murdered his own brother. "Could this really be so?" thought Colin. The boy wondered where and in what exact circumstances the tragedy had taken place. He wondered in which room the guns and swords and all those thousands of golden guineas had been hidden. Colonel Ossington had suggested a secret chamber as the probable receptacle; but Colin knew every nook and cranny about the building, and he was forced to acknowledge to himself that his grandfather's words were true when he said, "There is no such secret place in all the castle."

III

BUT on the following morning, when Colin accompanied Colonel Ossington in a walk round the garden, a new light seemed to come to him.

They were passing the little postern of which so much had been said—the postern through which, as the boy declared, he had himself seen the apparition of Neil Leslie disappear on the previous night. Here Colin now stood. He stamped his feet upon the ground.

"Listen!" he said. "Do you hear anything?" He stamped once again. "I've often thought, as I have passed this spot, that the ground seems to give back a hollow sound."

"And if it does, what of it?" asked Colonel Ossington.

"Well," said Colin, with a curious lift of his eyebrows, "I was thinking that it is just possible there may be some cave, or passage, or cellar under here; and that perhaps it was down there that the guns and things you were telling us of last night were stored."

"You may be right," smiled the colonel, "but I

don't see that it matters very much now. It's so long ago, you know."

"Yes," went on Colin, "but I should like to find out, all the same. I have often thought of it before—of the underground passage, I mean. Most castles in Scotland have underground passages somewhere, and Castle Leslie can scarcely be an exception. At one time I thought I had found a way into this one." He pointed up to the top of the ivy-covered wall. "You see the place where that buttress ends?" he asked. The colonel nodded. "Well, last spring a jenny wren built her nest up there. I wanted to get it. I climbed up from the inside of the ruin, and crept along the top of the wall. I had got as far as where the nest was when, leaning over to reach it, I felt one of the big stones give way beneath me. I held on by the ivy; but the loosened stone fell with a crash to the ground. I didn't look where it fell. I was only thinking of how I should get down with the nest. But a day or two afterwards I was coming through the place that used to be the guard-room in the old days, before Hawley's dragoons burnt this part of the castle down, and I saw the stone lying there. It wasn't smashed; but it had smashed the flagstone that it had fallen upon. Some parts of the flagstone had dropped through, right down into a sort of black well. I did not try to open the well; although I should have done if any other boys had been here to help me. But this morning I thought of it again in connection with your story——"

"I understand," interrupted the colonel. "You think it may have been down there that old Sir John Leslie hid the arms for the rebels, eh? Well, let me see this fancied entrance to the subterranean passage. Where is it?"

"It's through here," said Colin. And he led his companion through the postern gate into a large roofless room.

In one of the corners there was a heap of garden refuse, covered by a thin layer of melting snow. Colin

took an old spade and industriously cleared the rubbish away. Presently he revealed a large cracked flagstone. He went down on his knees and busily endeavoured to dislodge one of the broken fragments. He scraped and tore and pulled at it to no purpose. Then he stood up and stamped upon it. The rattling of loose earth underneath encouraged him to continue.

"Can you find such a thing as a pickaxe?" questioned Colonel Ossington.

Colin shook his head, but ran, nevertheless, in search of some such instrument, returning some minutes afterwards with a heavy sledge-hammer. With this he opened an assault upon the flagstone, and soon succeeded in loosening one small fragment. A small brown rat darted out from the excavation and scampered across the uneven floor.

"Wait!" cried the colonel; "lend me the hammer. Let us try first to remove this smaller stone, then we can better get at the larger one."

He took the sledge-hammer, raised it over his shoulder, and brought it down with a well-directed blow upon the smaller stone, splitting it. A second blow broke it into splinters. These he removed. Beneath them he discovered the end of a rusty bar of iron that was shot like a bolt through an iron ring. The bar seemed to extend under the larger flagstone, supporting it through its centre of gravity. For many minutes he hammered at the rusty iron, and with each blow the flagstone trembled on its axle and a shower of loosened stones and gravel fell into the depths below. With each development the old soldier's energy increased, while Colin looked on absorbed in boyish expectation.

At last the corroded bar broke. The flagstone collapsed and slipped a few inches into the void, where it was arrested by some obstacle. Its removal revealed an irregular opening, some two feet in diameter.

"You were right, boy," remarked the colonel; "there is indeed a secret chamber here, and this is, or once was, its entrance. See! the flagstone has formed a sort of trap-door. It may have been opened by a spring set under the smaller stone at the side. Look down there; you can see the edge of one of the stone stairs."

"Can we get down?" asked Colin.

"It is possible, I think," returned the old soldier. "But we should require a lighted lantern. Could you fetch one?"

Colin ran off. He was absent some ten minutes. During that interval Colonel Ossington contrived so to force back the broken flagstone that it left an opening sufficiently wide to admit his body. He went upon his knees and thrust his feet into the cavity, descending step by step until his eyes were on a level with the paved floor. There he waited, resting with his hands on the second step. The fingers of his right hand touched something that was softer than the cold stone. He gripped it and drew it forth into the fuller light. It was a fragment of mouldy cloth or felt. Attached to it was a disc of tarnished metal upon which the figure "4" was embossed.

"God!" he exclaimed, "it's the badge of the Fourth Foot."

He tore off the badge and thrust it into his pocket. At this moment Colin Leslie appeared with the lighted lantern, and accompanied by his grandfather.

"I am glad you have come too, Sir Donald," said the colonel somewhat absently.

"What boy's adventure are you contriving now, colonel?" demanded Sir Donald. "One would think that you had gone back to your childhood."

"Not quite so far back as that," returned the old soldier grimly, "but my mind has indeed gone back to my young manhood. Give me the light, Colin," he added, turning to the lad. "I had better, perhaps, go down in advance."

Colin handed him the lantern and stood at the top of



“Colin handed him the lantern.”

the steps watching him slowly and cautiously descend. The light flickered upon the damp moss-grown stones of

the walls that formed the sides of the narrow stairway. It went down and down, growing gradually dimmer and dimmer, until at last it died away. The old grandfather and Colin waited, listening. They faintly heard the tread of the colonel's spurred boots echoing hollowly in the darkness. Once they heard him cough, and then all was silent. The minutes slowly passed. Sir Donald grew a trifle nervous, his nervousness being indicated by the impatient tapping of his foot.

"Listen!" cried Colin. "I heard something fall—something that rattled." He knelt down and peered into the opening. "I hear him walking," he whispered. "He's coming nearer now. Now he has stopped. Now he is coming on again. He's on the stairs. He's carrying something that knocks against each step. I can see the reflection of the light now. And now here's the lantern." The boy drew back. "Mind your head, colonel, or you'll knock it," he cried.

Colonel Ossington did not require the caution. Bending his head, he crept upward, holding the lantern in his extended hand. Presently his face appeared in the aperture. It was ghastly white, and his eyes stared wildly. He drew a deep breath of the fresher air.

"You had better come down," he said, glancing up at Sir Donald Leslie; and drawing his left hand upward, he cast an old and rusty broadsword at the old man's feet. Sir Donald glanced at the weapon and kicked it aside.

"Come!" reiterated the colonel in a voice of authority, and the grandfather slowly obeyed. Colin followed him down the steps, although he was aware that he had not been included in the command. Perhaps he would have been wiser to remain where he was, but his boyish curiosity and love of adventure overcame his caution. Step by step they descended into the gloom. The air about them was damp and cold and stifling. The walls dripped with moisture. The stone stairs were slimy. Darkness hemmed

them in, saving only for a fitful glimmer of the lantern light that was below them.

"Three steps more," Sir Donald," said the colonel, standing aside on the firm floor of what appeared to be an arched vault. He held the light aloft. "Now, follow me closely," he added; "the passage turns sharply to the left. Be careful of the corner. I knocked my elbow against it just now. Is that the boy behind you?"

"Yes."

"He ought not to have come. Never mind now; let him follow close at your heels. Now halt and look down upon the floor while I hold the light."

The colonel held out his free hand and gripped the older man's arm, directing his gaze into a narrow archway.

"Those are the muskets," he said. "There are two hundred there. I have counted them."

Colin crept up to his grandfather's side, holding him by the skirts of his coat. Looking into the archway he saw the neatly stacked-up guns, with their rusty barrels and locks and rotting stocks.

The colonel drew his companions onward some three or four steps.

"And here are the claymores," said he. "You see the rebels did not get them, after all."

"No, Alan was true," murmured Sir Donald. "I felt sure he would frustrate their delivery. But——" He gripped the soldier's arm and asked in a suppressed but eagerly acquisitive tone: "But where was the gold, colonel? Did Neil take it all—every guinea of it?"

The colonel held his lantern full in front of Sir Donald's face, which he regarded with an expression of undisguised contempt.

"The gold," he answered, "was stored in the next vault. And," he added loftily, as he signed to Sir Donald to go past him, "I think you will find it all there still."

"The light! the light!" demanded Sir Donald. "Hold it nearer, that I may see."

By the help of the lantern he made his way a few steps farther into the chamber. The yellow rays of light were cast into the low vault. On the floor of hewn rock were many little canvas bags, that were so rotten and mouldy that their sides had fallen away under the pressure of the golden guineas that they had contained. The gold glistened in the lantern light. With greedy outstretched hands, and with eyes staring wide with covetousness, Sir Donald leapt at the treasure. He plunged his fingers into the midst of the coins, lifting his filled hands, and letting the gold fall from them in a jingling shower.

"Wonderful!" he cried. "Ah! now I am rich—rich—rich!" He glanced behind him with shrinking, miserly fear. "It's mine—all mine!" he frenziedly exclaimed, and proceeded eagerly to fill his pockets.

Colonel Ossington lightly touched him on the shoulder.

"Remember, my friend, that the money is Jacobite money," said he. "It was meant for the Pretender, you know."

Sir Donald's coat-pockets were already full to overflowing.

"Meant for the Pretender?" he repeated. "Ah, but look! look!" he added, holding up one of the coins to the light, "every one of them bears the head of the King! No; do not go yet! Let me have the lantern."

"The money will not run away," remarked Colonel Ossington, passing on with the lantern. "You have found it, and may return when you will. And now, since we have solved the material part of the mystery, let us go further that you may understand its more human side."

He led the way, with Colin at his side, and the grandfather was perforce obliged to follow.

"There is something here that you must see," said the colonel, as, having turned a sharp angle in the passage,

he stood still, with his hat under his arm and holding the light in front of him so that its rays shot along the slimy floor. Wondering, Sir Donald and his grandson bent forward, searching into the gloom. Colin drew back as his eyes rested for a moment on something white. But he advanced again and timidly looked once more. His trembling finger pointed down upon the floor at the gaunt, fleshless face and the tall form of a man that was partly hidden under mouldy folds of a Highland plaid and kilt. At the left shoulder there was a tarnished silver brooch, set in the centre with a dim yellow stone. The man lay flat on his back. His sword was in its scabbard at his side; the blanched bones of his right hand still held the remains of one of the canvas money-bags. The gold guineas lay in a little pile beneath the long fingers.

"He was carrying that bag of gold to give to the Prince's messenger," cried the boy Colin, aghast. "It is Neil—Neil Leslie!"

"Yes," nodded Colonel Ossington. "And he must have been met just here by his murderer."

"*Neil?*" echoed Sir Donald, reeling back; "my brother Neil? Then he did not escape to France? And he has been dead all this time!" The old man shuddered. "Murdered, did you say? But who could have murdered him down here? Perhaps he died naturally. Perhaps he could not find his way out up those stairs and through the stone trap-door!"

"The trap-door could certainly be opened only from the outside," remarked the colonel. "This place was evidently built as a dungeon—a prison from which it was not meant that any one should escape. But," he added solemnly, "Neil Leslie was not a prisoner. He probably left the door open, not expecting to be interrupted by the villain who drove that dagger into his honest heart. Do you see the dagger, Donald Leslie?" He pointed to the dead man's breast, and brought the lantern nearer until



"Neil? my brother Neil?"

its gleam fell upon the jewelled hilt of a Highland dirk. "You should recognise the weapon—as I do. It used to hang under the painted portrait of the Lady Belinda. It is the same weapon that Alan Leslie carried away with him on the eve of Culloden fight."

"I do not believe it!" cried Sir Donald excitedly. "My brother Alan never was down here. He did not know of the existence of such a place, any more than I did until this hour. For all that you say I do not believe but that my brother Alan died like a brave man on Culloden Moor, fighting, I thank God, for the King!"

Colonel Ossington silently shook his head and turned away, carrying the lantern with him to the foot of the stairs by which the three had entered the dungeon. Here he stood, holding the lantern so that its light shone only directly in front of him. He confronted Sir Donald and Colin, the while he put his hand into his breast pocket, and drew something forth which he held out for the old man's inspection.

"I found this on one of the upper stairs when I first entered," he said, holding the thing under the light. "It came off a soldier's regimental cap. It is the badge of the Fourth Foot. The man who wore it and who left it lying up there was a man whom I once called my friend; but whom I now know to have been a dishonourable spy, an unscrupulous traitor, an assassin and a fratricide. When Neil Leslie came down here faithfully to fulfil his father's instructions, he was dogged and followed by his brother. It was Alan Leslie who murdered him."

"Then where is Alan now?" interrupted Sir Donald. "Why did he never come home?"

"Because," answered the colonel, "when he came down here to kill his brother, he made the mistake of closing the trap-door behind him. He could not open it, he could not escape. He was imprisoned here with

his dead victim. He may have starved; he may have been suffocated by the smoke from the burning building above him that night when Hawley's dragoons set fire to the castle. However it was, he never left this place." The colonel moved aside, allowing the light to shine upon the dull red, mildewed cloth of a soldier's coat that covered the crouching figure of a man long dead. "That is what remains of Alan Leslie," he added grimly. He handed the lantern to Colin, bidding the lad hold it aloft. He knelt down. "When a soldier disgraces his regiment," he continued, "we usually remove the facings from his uniform. This man was not worthy to wear the uniform of so honoured a regiment as the Fourth Foot."

"I think," remarked Colin, "that, rebel though he was, Neil Leslie was by far the better man."

"I am sure of it, my boy," returned Colonel Ossington.

A DANGEROUS GAME

By GEORGE MANVILLE FENN

Author of "Frank and Saxon," &c. &c.

CHAPTER I

"O H, bother the old books!"

And as if to bother them, though more likely to break their backs, Lance Penwith closed two with a sharp clap, rose from his seat at the table, and then, holding one flat in each hand, he walked round behind his cousin, who was bent over another, with his elbows on the study-table, a finger in each ear, and his eyes shut as if to keep in the passage he was committing to memory. But the next moment he had started up, hurting his knees, and stood glaring angrily at Lance, who was roaring with laughter.

For the hearty-looking sunburned boy had passed behind his fellow-student's chair with the intention of putting his books on one of the shelves, but seeing his opportunity, a grin of enjoyment lit up his face, and taking a step back, he stood just at his cousin's back, and brought the two books he carried together, cymbal fashion, but with all his might, and so close to the reader's head that the air was stirred and the sharp crack made him spring up in alarm.

"What did you do that for?"

"To wake you up, Alf. There, put 'em away now, and let's go down to the cliff."

"And leave my lessons half done?—Don't you do

that again. You won't be happy till I've given you a sound thrashing."

"Shouldn't be happy then," said Lance, with a laugh ; "and besides, you couldn't do it, Alfy, my lad, without I lay down to let you."

"What ! I couldn't ?"

"Not you. Haven't got strength enough. Jolly old molly-coddle, why don't you come out and bathe and climb and fish ?"

"And hang about the dirty old pilchard houses and among the drying hake, and mix with the rough old smugglers and wreckers."

"How do you know they're smugglers and wreckers ?"

"Everybody says they are, and uncle would be terribly angry if I told him all I know about your goings on."

"Tell him, then : I don't care. Father doesn't want me to spend all my time with my nose in a book, my eyes shut, and my ears corked up with fingers."

"Uncle wants you to know what Mr. Grimston teaches us."

"Course he does. Well, I know my bits."

"You don't : you can't. You haven't been at work an hour."

"Yes, I have ; we sat down at ten, and it's a quarter past eleven, and I know everything by heart. Now, then, you listen."

"Go on, then," cried the other.

"Not likely. I've done. Come on and let's do something. The rain's all gone off and it's lovely out."

"There, I knew you didn't," cried the other. "You can't have learned it all. And look here, if you do that again I shall certainly report it to uncle."

"Very well, report away, sneaky. Now then, will you come ? We'll get Old Poltree's boat and make Hezz come and row."

The student reseated himself, frowning, and bent over his book again.

"Look here," cried his cousin, "I'll give you one more chance. Will you come?"

No answer.

"One more chance. Will you come?"

"Will you leave off interrupting me?" cried the other furiously.

"Certainly, sir. Very sorry, sir. Hope you will enjoy yourself, sir. Poor old Alf! He'll want specs soon."

Then pretending great alarm, the speaker darted out into the hall, and thrust his head through a door on the right, which he half opened, and stood looking in at a slightly grey-haired lady who was bending over her work.

"Going out, mother," he said.

The lady looked up and smiled pleasantly.

"Don't be late for dinner, my dear. Two o'clock punctually, mind."

"Oh, I shall be back," said the boy, laughing.

"And don't do anything risky by the cliff."

"Oh no, I'll mind."

The boy closed the door and crossed the hall, just as a shadow darkened the porch, and a tall, bluff-looking man entered.

"Hullo, you, sir!" he cried; "how is it you are not at your studies?—Going out?"

"Yes, father; down to the shore a bit. Done lessons."

"Why don't you take your cousin with you?"

"Won't come, father. I did try."

It was only about half a mile to the cliff, where a few fishermen's cottages stood on shelves of the mighty granite walls which looked as if they had been built up of blocks by the old Cornish ogres, weeded out by the celebrated Jack the Giant-killer; and here Lance made his way to where

in front of one long whitewashed granite cot, perched a hundred feet above the shore, there was a long protecting rail formed of old spars planted close to the edge of the cliff, just where a tiny river discharged itself into the sea. This opened sufficiently to form a little harbour for half-a-dozen fishing luggers, the rocks running out sufficiently to act as a breakwater and keep off the huge billows which at times came rolling in from the south-west, so that on one side of the cliffs lay piled up a slope of wave-washed and rounded boulders, many as big as great Cheshire cheeses, while on the other, where the luggers lay, there were pebbles and sand.

Upon this rail four men were leaning with folded arms, apparently doing nothing but stare out at the bright, clear sea; but every eye was keenly on the look-out for one of those dark-cloud, shadow-like appearances on the surface which to them meant money and provisions.

But there was no sign of fish breaking the surface of the water, and as Lance approached he had a good view of four immense pairs of very thick flannel trousers, whose bottoms were tucked into as many huge boots, which, instead of being drawn well up their owners' thighs, hung in folds about their ankles, and glittered in the sunshine, where they were well specked with bright fish scales.

Higher up Lance looked upon four pairs of very short braces, hitched over big bone buttons, and holding the aforesaid trousers close up under their wearers' armpits. The rest of the costume consisted of caps, home-made, and of fur formerly worn by unfortunate seals which had come too near a boat instead of seeking safety in one of the wave-washed caves round the point.

"Hi! Old Poltree!" shouted Lance, as he drew near, "where's Hezz?"

The broadest man present raised his head a little, screwed it round, and unfolding his arms, set one at liberty to give three thrusts downward of a hand which was of the same

colour as all that could be seen of a very hairy face—mahogany.

"Thankye," shouted Lance, turning off to the left, and the big man folded his arms again and looked seaward, the others not having stirred.

Lance's turn to the left led him to a steep descent all zigzag—a way to the shore that a stranger would have attacked like a bear and gone down backwards ; but Lance was no stranger, and the precipitous nature of the way did not deter him, for he descended in a series of jumps from stone to stone, till he finished with a drop of about ten or a dozen feet into a bed of sand lying at the mouth of a wave-scooped hollow, from which came strange moans and squeaks, the latter painfully shrill, the former deepening at times into a roar.

The said stranger would have imagined that a person had fallen from the cliff and was lying somewhere below, badly broken and wanting help ; but there was nothing the matter. It was only Hezz, or more commonly "Hezz-zerer," in three syllables, and he had been busy at work putting a patch on the bottom of a clumsy upturned boat which, as he put it, "lived in the cave," and he was now daubing his new patch with hot tar from a little three-legged iron kettle held in his left hand.

But this does not account for the groans and squeaks.

These were produced from the youth's throat. In fact, Hezz was singing over his work, though it did not sound very musical at the time, for something was broken ; but it was only Hezz's voice, and it was only the previous night that Old Poltree, his father, had said to Billy Poltree, another of the big fisherman's offspring, "Yo' never know wheer to have him now, my son : one minute he's hoarse as squire's Devon bull, and next he's letting go like the pig at feeding time."

At the sound of the dull thuds made by Lance's feet in the sand, Hezz Poltree whisked himself round and

held his tar-kettle and brush out like a pair of balances to make him turn, and showed a good-looking young mahogany face—that is to say, it was paler than his father's, and not so ruddy and polished.

"Hullo, Master—Lance," he said, widening his mouth and showing his white teeth, joining in the laughter as the visitor threw himself down on the sand and roared.



"Whisked himself round and held his tar-kettle and brush out like a pair of balances."

"I can't help it, Master—Lance."

"Try again," cried the new-comer, wiping the tears from his eyes.

"I do try," growled the boy, beginning once more in a deep bass, and then ending in a treble squeak. "There's somethin' got loose in my voice. 'Tarn't my fault. S'pose it's a sort o' cold."

"Never mind, gruff un. But I didn't know the boat

was being mended. I wanted to go out fishing, and the pitch isn't dry."

"That don't matter," growled Hezz, setting down his kettle and brush, and catching up a couple of handfuls of dry sand, which he dashed over the shiny tar. "Come on."

Lance came on in the way of helping to turn the clumsy boat over on its keel; then it was spun round so as to present its bows to the sea; a block was placed underneath, another a little way off, and the two boys skilfully ran it down the steep sandy slope till it was half afloat, when they left it while they went back to the natural boat-house for the oars, hitcher, and tackle.

"Got any bait?" said Lance.

"Heaps," came in a growl. Then in a squeak—"Thought you'd come down, so I got some wums—lugs and rags, and there's four broken pilchards in the maund, and a couple o' dozen sand-eels in the coorge out yonder by the buoy."

"Are there any bass off the point?"

"Few. Billy saw some playing there 'smorning, but p'raps they won't take."

"Never mind; let's try," said Lance eagerly. "Look sharp; I must be back in time for dinner."

"Lots o' time," growled Hezz, as he loaded himself up with the big basket, into which he had tumbled the coarse brown lines and receptacles of bait, including a scaly piece of board with four damaged pilchards laid upon it and a sharp knife stuck in the middle. "You carry the oars and boat-hook," came in a squeak.

They hurried down to the boat, and were brought back to the knowledge that four pairs of eyes were watching them from a hundred feet overhead, by Old Poltree roaring out as if addressing some one a mile at sea—

"You stopped that gashly leak proper, my son?"

"Iss, father," cried Hezz, in a shrill squeak, as he dumped down his load.

Lance thrust in the oars and hitcher and sprang in, after giving the boat a thrust; and as a little wave came in and floated her, Hezz ran her out a bit farther and sprang in too, thrust an oar over the stern, and sculled the craft out, fish-tail fashion, to where a black keg did duty for a buoy. Here he kept the boat's head while Lance leaned over the side to unhitch a piece of line and draw a spindle-shaped wicker basket along the side to the stern, where he made it fast to a ring bolt, the movement sending a score or so of eely-looking silvery fish gliding over one another and flashing by the thin osiers of which the basket was formed.

Then each seized an oar and pulled right away to get round the rocky buttress which was continued outward in a few detached rocks, that stood up boldly, to grow smaller farther out, and farther, till only showing as submerged reefs over which the sea just creamed and foamed.

It was out here that the tide ran swiftly, a favourite spot for the bass to play, and as they approached the familiar spot Lance handed his oar to his sturdy companion, while he took one of the lines, laid the hook and lead ready, and then drew the coorge in, opened a wicker trap-door in the top, inserted his hand, closed the lid again, and with deft fingers hooked the silvery writhing fish, popped it overboard, and let the line run out with the tide, while Hezz kept the boat carefully, as nearly as he could, in one place.

"There they are, Master Lance," he cried. "Be on the look-out; they'll take that bait pretty sharp perhaps."

The lad was quite right, for hardly five minutes had elapsed before there was a snatch at the line, and something was hooked.

"Got him!" cried Lance, whose face was glowing with excitement. "Oh, why didn't Alfie come? I say, Hezz, he's a whopper. He does pull. Shall I let him run?"

"Gahn! no. Haul him in fast as you can, 'fore he gets off."

The tackle was coarse and strong, and there was no scientific playing attempted. It was plain, straightforward pully-haully work, and in a very short time the transparent water astern seemed to be cut into flashing streaks by something silvery which was drawn in hand over hand, till, just as Lance was leaning over to get his fingers close to the end of the snood where the hook was tied, the water was splashed up into his face, and he sat up with a cry of disappointment, seeing only a streak of silver flashing in the sunshine, for the fish had gone.

"Never mind: bait again," squeaked Hezz.

"Bait again," cried Lance, imitating him. "What! with that hook? Look at it. Nearly straightened out. I wish you wouldn't have such nasty soft-roed things. Why, that was a fifteen pounder."

"Take another hook, Master Lance. Look sharp; look at 'em playing."

Lance put on a fresh hook, baited again, and sent the sand-eel gliding off along the rushing tide, which played among the rocks like a mill-stream, and waited excitedly for another snatch, but waited in vain.

"Don't pull," he said at last; "let the boat run out a bit."

Hezz obeyed, cleverly managing so that the boat glided slowly after the bait in the direction of the broken water where the shoal of bass could be seen feeding; but they got no nearer, for so sure as the boat went farther from land, so did the fish, and in spite of fresh and tempting baits being tried there was no seizure made.

"That there one as got away has told all the others to look out," said Hezz, with a chuckle. "You won't get another bite."

"Stuff and nonsense! Just as if fish could talk! Let's go out farther."

The boat glided on, with the current growing less swift, and at last Lance drew in his line, sat down, and between them they rowed slowly in against the sharp current.

"It's no good now," said Hezz. "Let's go along yonder by the mouth of the caves, and try for a pollack among the rocks. If we don't get one we may ketch a rock-fish or two."

"Or a conger in one of the deep holes."

"Nay, you won't ketch none o' them till it's getting dark."

"Dark enough in the holes," said Lance.

"Very well; you try."

So the boat was rowed out of the sharp current, and then away towards the west under the cliffs, and about a hundred yards from the shore, where the tide ran slowly. Here Lance gave up his oar and began to fish again, trying first one and then another kind of bait, but with no greater result than catching a grey gurnard—"tub" Hezz called it—and soon after a couple of gaily-coloured wrasse, not worth having.

"Oh, this is miserable work!" cried the boy, drawing in his line and covering a large hook with half a pilchard. "Pull a little farther along, and I'll throw out in that dark quiet part. There'll be a conger there, I know."

Hezz uttered a croak, and his eyes said plainly, "No conger there"; but he rowed to the spot, which was where a rock rose up out of the water like a little island, on which a dusky cormorant which had been fishing sat drying its wet wings, paying no heed to the approaching boat till it was some twenty yards away, when the bird took flight and went off close to the surface.

"Now put her just in yonder," said Lance, "and be as gentle as you can, so as to keep her there without splashing."

Hezz obeyed cleverly enough; and his companion, after



“Rev’nue cutter,” said Hezz shortly.

seeing that the line lay in rings free from obstruction, sent the heavy sinker and bait right away to where the water looked blackest, making Hezz chuckle loudly.

"What are you laughing at?"

"You: telling me to be so quiet, and sending the lead in with a splash like that."

"Don't matter; it's only at the top. The fish deep down won't notice it. Look! it is deep too," for the line went on running out as the lead descended, and Lance seated himself to wait, with a self-satisfied look upon his countenance.

"I like fishing in the still water," he said. "You see if I don't soon get hold of something big."

"P'raps," said Hezz; "but I never caught anything here."

"Ah, you don't know everything. I say, what's that vessel out yonder?"

"*Chasse-marée*," said Hezz, shading his eyes to look at the long three-masted lugger with a display of interest.

"No, no; the one with all the white sails set."

"Rev'nue cutter," said Hezz shortly; and proof of his words was given the next minute, for there was a white puff of smoke seen to dart out from her bows, and a dull thud echoed from the cliff.

"Why, she's after that long lugger. She's a smuggler," cried Lance excitedly. "Is there going to be a fight?"

"Na-a-a-y!" growled Hezz. "She's only fishing."

"How do you know? She's a smuggler, and there'll be a fight. Let's row out and see."

But in obedience to the summons the long low vessel glided slowly round till her brown sails began to shiver and flap, and as the boys watched they saw the cutter run pretty close up, and a small boat was lowered and rowed across.

"They're French, and cowards," cried Lance, who was deeply interested. "They've surrendered without striking a blow."

"Arn't got nothing to strike blows with," croaked Hezz sulkily. "Didn't I tell you she was a fishing-boat?"

"Oh, yes; but I know what fishing-boats catch sometimes, Master Hezz," said Lance, laughing, his companion looking at him curiously the while—"brandy snappers, 'bacco biters, and lace-fins, Hezz. But they're French cowards, or they'd have made a run of it. I say, they'll make her a prize, and take her into port. Where will they take her—Plymouth or Falmouth?"

"Nowheres. They'll let her go."

The lads sat watching till all at once in the distance they saw the little boat row back, and the sails of the *chasse-marée* began to fill.

"Who's right now?" said Hezz, laughing.

"I am. They've put a prize crew on board."

"What! out of that little boat?" squeaked Hezz. "That they haven't. There was five in her when she put off, and there's five in her now."

"You can't see at this distance."

"Can't I? That I can, quite plain."

"That's upset all my fishing," said Lance, "and it's getting on for dinner-time. Oh, what bad luck I do have!"

"You ketch lots sometimes, and you did nearly get a fine bass to-day. That was a good twelve-pounder."

"Twelve? Fifteen," said Lance, preparing to haul in his line.

"P'raps," said Hezz. "Going to try any more?"

"No; I mustn't be late for—— Oh, look here! I've got one on."

For the line was tight, and as Lance began to haul, it was against a heavy persistent drag.

"Lead caught in the rocks," croaked Hezz contemptuously.

"Oh, is it! Look here! It's coming up."

"Weed, then," squeaked Hezz.

"'Tisn't," cried Lance ; "I know by the heavy, steady pull. It's a big conger."

"No congers there."

"How do you know?"

"And if there were they wouldn't bite at this time of day."

"You mind your own business," cried Lance excitedly. "It's a thumping big one, and he isn't awake yet to his being hooked. He's coming, and he'll begin to make a rush directly to get in his hole. You begin rowing, and get him right out away from the rocks."

Hezz did as he was told, but only made two or three strokes and then stopped, for his companion had to give line.

"Slower," said Lance, panting, as he held on again. "Wait till he makes a rush. I say, did you bring the big gaff hook?"

"No ; but that line 'll hold any conger you can catch, and I've got the little chopper in the locker when he comes on board. But that isn't a conger."

"'Tis, I tell you. I can feel him trying to get back. —What is it, then?"

"Weed," croaked Hezz in his deep bass.

"You're a weed ! It's a big conger, and he has got his tail round a rock or in a hole."

"Let him go, then."

"What ? Why he'd shuffle back into his hole, and I should lose him. Wait till he gets a bit tired and gives way a bit."

"Let go, and if it's a conger he'll slack the line and come swimming up to see what's the matter. But you've only hooked a weed."

"Ha ! ha !" laughed Lance. "You're a clever one, Hezz. Look, he's coming up quite steady ;" and the boy drew in a couple of yards of line.

"It arn't a conger, or he'd begin to cut about now and shake his head to get riddy of the hook."

"Then it's some other big fish. Think it's a shark."

"No. What would a shark be doing there?"

"I dunno; but he's coming up. I say, put down the oars."

Hezz nodded, laid in his oars, and stood close behind his companion, gradually growing as excited for a minute or so, and then grinning.

"It arn't no fish," he said.

"It is, I tell you," cried Lance, as he kept up a steady haul, the boat having yielded till it was exactly over the line.

"I never see a fish take it so quiet as that," continued Hezz.

"It's only till he sees us, and then he'll make a desperate rush to get away."

"I'll be ready for him," said Hezz, laughing softly, as he gently rested the handle of the boat-hook on the side, thrusting it out towards the tightened line, which still came slowly in, though the strain threatened to make it part. "Hope it will be good to eat, Master Lance."

"I know what it is," cried the boy, in a low hoarse voice. "It's one of those great cuttles, the same as were washed on shore after last year's storm. It will come up all of a lump, with its feelers and suckers twisted round the line."

A sudden change came over Hezz. Instead of grinning, his face turned preternaturally solemn, and taking his right hand from the boat-hook he thrust it into his pocket, drew out a big jack-knife, to open it by seizing the blade in his teeth.

"That's right," whispered Lance, husky now with the excitement; "but don't use the knife if you can get a good hold with the hook. Look, look, here it comes! Oh, it is a monster!"



“A vigorous cut divided the fishing-line.”

The boy had been steadily hauling till he had brought his capture nearly to the surface, and he now

caught sight of what seemed to be its curved and rounded body.

"Now, Hezz—quick! down with the hook. Get a good hold at once. Snatch, lad, snatch!"

But at the crucial moment, when the dark back of the monster slowly rolled up to the surface, Hezz dropped the boat-hook, leaned over the side, hindering his companion's view, and plunged his knife-armed hand down under water.

The next moment there was a slight jar which ran from Lance's fingers right up his arms, the tension ceased, and a yard or two of the stout fishing-line flew up in the holder's face.

For, as if to save his companion from some danger, Hezz had reached down as low as he could, and with a vigorous cut divided the fishing-line, so that the dark round body sank down again like a shadow, leaving the two lads gazing fiercely at each other.

"Oh, I say!" cried Lance. "Only to think of that! Why, Hezz, it's——"

"Never you mind what it is," said the boy roughly.

"And you knew it was, then?"

"Swears I didn't," said the boy fiercely. "Think I should have let you fish there if I had knowed?"

"Why, there must have been a whole string of 'em tied together on a line and sunk there."

"You don't know nothing of the sort," growled Hezz. "You didn't see."

"I saw one; and another coming like a shadow."

"No, you didn't."

"Yes, I did—brandy kegs—smuggled. Here, I'll hail the cutter."

"No, you don't," said Hezz fiercely; and as he stood with the knife in his hand he looked threatening. "They couldn't hear you if you did."

"Then I'll make signals."

"No, you won't. I shan't let you, and you wouldn't be such a sneak, Master Lance."

"It isn't the act of a sneak."

"Yes, it is. Your cousin would, but you wouldn't get poor men into trouble."

That hit hard, and Lance hesitated.

"Why, it must be your father's and your brother's doing. And just under our noses too! Oh, what a disgraceful shame! There, Hezz, I've done with you."

"I didn't know about it, Master Lance."

"You must have known."

"Wish I may die if I did. There!"

"Take the oars, Hezz," said Lance coldly.

"But, Master Lance——"

"Take the oars," said Lance sternly. "I want to go home."

"To tell Squire Penwith what you've seen? O Master Lance! you don't know what you're going to do."

"No," said Lance sternly, as the lad took the oars and began to row back, "I don't."

"You make me feel as if I'd sooner kill you than you should do this. It means having my poor father took up and sent out of the country, and p'raps he didn't know the kegs was hid like that."

"Go on rowing, I tell you," cried Lance sharply, "make haste. Pull! do you hear? Pull!"

Hezz uttered a low sound something like a gulp, and dragged away at the oars with all his might till he ran the boat on to the sands, where Lance was perfectly aware, though he would not look up, that the four big fishermen were still leaning over the rail and looking out to sea, and he expected to hear a cheery question as to sport as he hurried up over the sands and began to climb the zigzag.

But no hail came, for the men's eyes were bent upon the revenue cutter, a mile away, watching every movement of that and the *chasse-marée*.

At least so thought Lance Penwith as he hurried home, pondering upon his cousin's words, and asking himself whether he was not doing wrong by associating with these fisher-folk on the cliff.

"I must tell father," he said to himself. "I ought to tell him," he said ; and then he began thinking of what it meant, the severe punishment of pretty well every man in the cluster of cottages, some being sent to prison, the younger men to serve in King George's men-of-war ; and ever since he could remember, they had all been to him the kindest friends.

CHAPTER II

"I CAN'T help it," said Lance to himself, after a weary sleepless night ; "I don't feel as if I could go and tell tales. I'm not sure ; and if I was wrong, and these men were punished for what they did not do, I should never be happy again."

Lance had made up his mind that he would have no more to do with the people down by the cliff, for he felt now that they were not honest. But there was a bitter feeling of disappointment in coming to this resolve ; for it had been so pleasant to get away from the refinements of home with its choice cookery, plate, glass, and fine linen, to the boisterous welcome he always had at Old Poltree's neat cottage. How delicious the baked hake was, and how luscious the conger pie !—though they were as nothing to the split and grilled fish he caught himself ; and Hezz's mother was always ready to cook for the two boys.

And now it was all over ; but still he might go and climb to the steep edge, from whence he could look down on the whitewashed cottages, the busy harbour, and the boats.

This he did, and grew quite excited as he saw that the revenue cutter was lying off the point, a couple of miles out, as if watching the place.

"Poor old Hezz!" he said to himself bitterly, "I hope they will not take him."

Then incongruously enough he smiled as he thought of the boy's breaking voice.

"They'd laugh at him if they heard him croak and squeak as he does now, and perhaps let him off because he's only a boy. But it would be horrible for the other men.

"Why, father's a magistrate too," said the lad suddenly, "and he'd be with the others who punished them for smuggling if it was found out. Oh, I can't go and tell what I know! It would be horrid."

Lance lay there upon the warm cliff for some time thinking, and then he started and looked down, wondering at what was to him quite a marvel. For there, moving slowly, about a hundred feet below him, was his cousin, threading his way amongst the masses of granite tangled with brambles, in a part where there was no path, nothing more than a faint track or two made by the grazing sheep, and it seemed unaccountable.

"What's he doing there?" muttered Lance. "He must be looking for me. Well, let him look. I don't want him. If I shout to him he'll only come and begin to preach at me in his pompous way. When I'm in a good temper it only makes me laugh; but I'm in a bad temper now, and if he begins I shall feel as if I must punch his head."

So Lance lay and watched, making unpleasant remarks the while, all of a derisive nature. He watched till Alfred had disappeared beyond the chaos of rocks which had fallen from above, and at last he strolled back home, forgetting all about his cousin till he took his place at the luncheon-table, and felt surprised to see him there,

looking quite cool and as if he had passed the morning reading in the shade.

There was another surprise for Lance before he left the table, the squire letting fall the announcement that Captain Barry was going to dine there at six o'clock that evening.

"So you boys will have to put on your best manners."

"Who's Captain Barry, father?"

"To speak correctly, he is Lieutenant Barry, my boy, and is in command of the revenue cutter lying on and off. They are giving us all a good hunt up, for he tells me that there has been a great deal of smuggling carried on along this coast; but I told him the only smuggling about here is the smuggling of fish."

Lance felt that the tips of his ears turned hot, and thought that they must be red. He knew that this was the opportunity for telling all he had found out, but somehow the words would not come.

The officer was rowed ashore from the cutter that evening, and the squire had walked down to the tiny harbour, with the two boys, to meet him, and find him a frank, pleasant, middle-aged man, who, for some reason, had never been promoted.

He shook hands, and Lance turned scarlet, and then glanced shoreward, to see that Hezz was busy turning the clumsy boat half inside the cavern, and that the big trousers and boots were up on the shelf, while the men inside them seemed to be gazing out to sea in search of a coming shoal.

The officer was very pleasant and frank during his stay. He chatted with the boys and asked them if they would like to go to sea; but somehow he found Lance dull and glum, and the boy's father bantered him that night after the visitor had gone back to the cutter.

CHAPTER III

A WEEK had glided by, and fishing was in full progress below the cliff. Hezz and his people had enclosed a small shoal of mackerel in their seine, and at another time Lance would have been in the thick of the business, revelling in seeing the line of corks drawn in closer and closer till the shoal was dashing about seeking for a way of escape, before the tuck net was brought to bear, and the arrowy wave and ripple-marked fish were ladled out in baskets.

Lance had watched the movements of the cutter anxiously while she stayed off the point; but one fine day she had glided away west with all sail set to the light breeze, and the boy breathed more freely.

Then the days passed and nothing seemed to happen, except that when Lance went along the high cliffs, climbing from place to place till he settled himself down in some snug rift where he could scan the sea and note what was going on in the cove below, to see if there was any sign of smuggling, he found that his cousin came cautiously along no less than three times, and the boy laughed to himself from his hiding-place.

"He's watching me to see if I go down and join Hezz. How can any one be such a sneak?"

Lance often mused after this fashion as the days slipped by; but he kept away from the people down by the cliff, in spite of a wistful look or two he caught from Hezz, who came up to the house several times to sell fish.

"No," Lance said firmly, "I haven't told tales; but I won't have anything to do with smugglers."

One fine afternoon soon after dinner Lance saw his cousin go into the study and take down a book, rest his head on his hands, and begin to read.

Lance had followed him to propose that they should

go inland and have a ramble in the woods, but his cousin's action checked him.

"It's of no use," he said ; "he wouldn't come."

So the lad went off till he reached one of his favourite look-outs, just by a rift overgrown with brambles, where, when the tide was up, the whispering and washing of water could be heard, showing that one of the many caverns and cracks along the bold coast ran in a great way.

"Wish I knew which of them belonged to this," he had more than once said ; and upon this particular occasion as he seated himself he began listening to the strange whispering sounds.

"I meant to have tried to find this out," he said, "along with Hezz. Why, I did say something about it once, and he only laughed and said it was a land-spring. Well, I can't get the boat now."

Somehow the place had a strange fascination for him that day, and after looking about a bit he picked up a piece of mossy granite as big as his head and pitched it among the bramble growth and ferns just where the whispering washing sound could be faintly heard.

To his surprise there was the fluttering of wings, and a jackdaw flew out and away.

"Nest there," he muttered ; but his thoughts were divided by hearing the stone he had pitched down strike heavily, sending up a hollow sound ; and directly after it struck again more loudly, and all was still.

He was in the act of rising to examine the spot, but he sank down directly, ducking his head behind a great tuft of ragwort.

"Well, he is a sneak," he muttered.

He sat close, and Alfred passed about twenty yards below, going on cautiously away to the right, and passing out of sight.

Lance sighed, rose, and looked away to the west ;

but there was no sign of his cousin, so he walked back home.

The night came on soft and calm, and after sitting reading a bit, and going over some translation ready for the vicar next day, Lance looked up, to see that he was alone, so putting away his books he strolled out on to the big sloping lawn to where he could see the sea; but it looked quite dark and forbidding, and the stars were half hidden by a haze. Still it was very pleasant out there, and after a time he turned to look back at the house with its light or two in the windows of the ground-floor, while everything else looked black, till all at once a little window high up in the centre gable of the old Elizabethan place shone out brightly with a keen steady bluish light which lasted while he could have counted twenty, and then all was blacker than ever.

"Why, it's a firework," said Lance to himself. "It must be Alf."

He had hardly thought this when the light shone out again, burned brightly for a time, and once more went out, leaving the boy wondering, till it once again blazed out sharply, and left all blacker than ever.

Lance's mind was just as black and dark, for he could make nothing of it. Alfred was not likely to be letting off fireworks. What could it mean?

Coming to the conclusion that his cousin had been amusing himself in some way or another connected with chemistry, he stood thinking for a minute and then went in, to find the object of his thoughts sitting by his aunt's side talking quietly, while the squire seemed engrossed in a book.

"Well, perhaps you had better," said Mrs. Penwith. "There's nothing like bed for a bad sick headache."

The boy sighed, said good-night, and went up to his room.

"He had too long a walk to-day," said Mrs. Penwith,

"and the sun upset him. By the way, Lance, your cousin complains about your being given to avoiding him. Do, pray, put aside all sulkiness and be more brotherly."

"Why, it is Alf, mother, who never will come out with me."

"There, there, say no more about it," said Mrs. Penwith gently. "You know I wish you to be brotherly, so do try."

Lance felt too much aggrieved to say anything, and sat in moody silence till it was bed-time, when he said "good-night" and went to his own room, thinking the while about those lights.

There he lay, thinking and listening for above an hour, during which he heard the various sounds in the house of the servants shutting up and going to bed, and soon after his father and mother's room door closed, and he settled down to go to sleep.

He might as well have settled down to keep awake, for he turned and twisted, and got out of bed to drink water, and got in again. Then he turned the pillow and tried that. Next he threw off the quilt because he was too hot. And so on, and so on, till he sat up to try and face the question which haunted his brain: What did those lights in the little upper window mean?

"It's of no use," said the boy at last. "I shall never go to sleep till I know." He sprang out of bed and dressed himself, and then stood thinking. Did he dare go up in the dark to that little room in the roof and see whether he could find out anything?

Yes; and while the exaltation of brain was upon him, he softly opened his door, went out into the broad passage, and along it to the end where the little oak staircase led up to the three attic-like places in the three gables, rooms that were only used for lumber and stores.

The boy's heart beat heavily as he went up in his stockings, and twice over when a board cracked he was



“A signal ! came the next moment in answer.”

ready to rush back to his room ; but he forced himself into going on, and stood at last at the centre door of the three, feeling that if he hesitated now he should never do it.

So pushing the door it yielded, and he nearly darted back, for there was a peculiar sulphury smell in the dark room.

But Lance had made fireworks in his time, especially blue lights, and the smell was just the same as that, and he no longer felt scared, for the thought flashed across his brain that some one had burned some pieces of blue light there, and if such were the case there would be something on the window-sill on which they had been burned.

He stepped boldly in, and there, sure enough, he found what he expected—a little piece of sheet-iron about half the size of a slate.

But what for ?

A signal ! came the next moment in answer ; and wildly excited now, he stepped back across the room, descended the stairs and went to the door of his cousin's chamber, tried the door softly, found it yield, and entered.

The bed was empty, and quite cold.

CHAPTER IV

A FEW moments elapsed, and then it was Lance who had turned quite cold. For his brain was wonderfully active now, as he seemed to grasp as facts that his cousin had not been watching him on the cliff, but had found out something about the smugglers and was watching them. Then, too, he recalled how friendly he had been with the captain of the revenue cutter, and how they had talked together.

This, then, was the meaning of the signal : Alf had found out something—of course ; a long low *chasse-marée*

had been lying off that day, he recalled, and the signal lights had been meant for the cutter, which must have crept in at dusk, and for aught he knew the King's men might be landing, in answer to the signals, to catch the fishermen and smugglers in the very act of landing a cargo.

Right or wrong, Lance paused to think no more. It was a time to act and try and warn his old friends. How could Alf be such a sneak?

Quickly and silently he stepped out and back to his own room, put on his boots, opened the window and lowered himself down the heavy trellis, reached the lawn, and ran to get to the zigzag and reach Old Poltree's cottage on the ledge.

"I'll tell Hezz," he said to himself—"just say the King's men are out, and then get back."

It is easier to make plans than to carry them out.

When Lance reached the long whitewashed cottage, meaning to knock till Hezz came to his window, he was caught by a strong hand, wrenched round, and a hoarse voice said in a whisper—

"Who's this?"

"I—Lance, Mother Poltree. I came to tell you I'm afraid the King's men are coming to-night."

"Whish!" she said, as she clapped another great hand over his mouth. "Who told tales—you?"

"No, no, I wouldn't."

"Whish! they're coming," she cried, as she stood listening. "They came after you."

"I—I didn't know," whispered Lance, as he made out steps descending the zigzag, showing that he was only just in time, for whoever it was had been close behind.

"This way," said the old woman sternly, and all thought of retreat was cut off, for she held the boy's arm firmly and hurried him to the end of the cottage and across the patch of garden.



“For there below him, lit up by a few lanterns, he could make out the hull of a great lugger.”

The way was new to Lance, and thoroughly excited now, he allowed the sturdy old woman to half guide, half thrust him along, till the way was so narrow along the steep cliff slope that at her bidding he went on first, with the consequence that more than once he lost his footing, and would have fallen from the narrow track but for the help he received.

At one time they were ascending as if to climb to the cliff top, then down, and up again, till at the end of a few hundred yards a rift was reached, down which the old woman hurried the lad, uttering a peculiar hissing sound the while, which quite changed the aspect of the scene which had unfolded itself to Lance's astonished gaze. For there below him, lit up by a few lanterns, he could make out the hull of a great lugger, lying in the jaws of the rift down which they were hurrying, while men were wading waist-deep to and fro—those going out to the lugger's side empty-handed, these coming bearing bales and kegs, which they carried to a low rocky archway, so low that it must have been covered when the tide was up, while now they stooped and passed in their loads to other hands, which seized them and bore them away.

At the warning hiss uttered by the old fisherwoman the work ceased, and as a man, evidently the captain, swung himself down into the water, Old Poltree, his sons, and another man crept out from beneath the rugged archway.

Few words were spoken. The captain of the lugger gave an order or two, splashed through the water with his men, and climbed on board, where the lanterns were extinguished, hitchers and sweeps thrust forth on either side, and the English fishermen waded out to put their shoulders to the stern of the boat and help to thrust her out into the open water.

Their help did not last, for the water deepened rapidly and the great lugger was well on the move, and unless

the boats of the revenue cutter were waiting for them her safety was assured. The danger was from the shore for those who had been breaking the laws.

"This your doing, young gen'leman?" growled Old Poltree fiercely, approaching Lance.

"No!" cried the boy eagerly.

"Nay, no lies, my lad. The French skipper saw three lights, and he thought it was our doing. You did it to bring 'em on."

"Indeed, no!" cried Lance. "I saw them too, and as soon as I guessed what it meant I ran down to warn you; didn't I, Mother Poltree?"

"Iss, my son.—You're wrong, old man, it was t'other youngster. I told you he was after no good."

"Then it warn't you, Master Lance?" squeaked a voice. "Hooroar!"

"You hold your row, Hezzerer," growled his father; and then quickly, "Look, they've found the way down. Someun's showing 'em with a light."

His gruff voice was evidently heard, for from where the dull yellow light of a horn lantern shone at the top of the gash in the massive cliff a stern voice shouted—

"Surrender, in the King's name, or we fire."

"Fire away, then," muttered Old Poltree. "Tide'll be up soon. In with you, my lads. In with you, missus, for you can't get back now."

"Come along, Master Lance," whispered Hezz, who had crept close to his old companion.

"No, no!" cried Lance, aghast. "I'm not coming with you; I must go back."

"Nay, my son; you can't now," growled Old Poltree. "In with you;" and he dragged the boy down into the water and gave him a thrust, while as Lance indignantly raised his head again to rush back, he saw by the light of a single lantern held by one of the men that he was in a spacious water-floored cavern which evidently extended

for some distance ; but what interested him most in his awkward position was the sight of the big old man on one side of the exit, his eldest son on the other, each armed with a piece of broken oar, ready to defend the natural door against all comers.

"Right away with that light," growled the old man, and its bearer splashed through the water farther and farther away.

"Come on, Master Lance," whispered Hezz, catching him by the arm.

"Let go," cried the boy angrily. "I will not be taken with you."

"Nay, you shan't be, young Master Lance," whispered the old woman. "My Hezz'll show you the way out, while my old man keeps the sailors back till the tide's up and they can't get in."

"Yes, that's right, Master Lance," whispered Hezz, and the boy unwillingly followed the lantern-bearer till at the end of a hundred yards the water had ceased and they were walking over the dry rocky bottom of the rapidly-contracting cave, where Lance noticed that a heap of casks and bales had been hurriedly piled up.

And now from behind him there came the shouts of men and the noise of heavy blows and splashing ; but neither of those with him seemed in the least disturbed, Hezz even chuckling and saying—

"It's all right, old mother ; father won't let no one pass. I say, we shall have to haul you up."

"'Fraid so, my son," said the old woman. "I'm too heavy to clamber now."

A wild feeling of excitement pervaded Lance all this time, mingled with indignation at what he mentally called his cousin's treachery. But he felt better at the thought that he was to escape, for the idea of being captured with the smugglers was horrible.

And now his attention was taken up by the move-

ments of Hezz, who, while the man held the lantern up, took a coil of rope from where it rested on a big stone, thrust his head and one arm through it, and began to climb up a rugged narrow crack at the end of the cavern—climbing as if he had been up there before, and soon disappearing from their view.

But they could hear him plainly enough, his boots grating on the rock, and his heavy breathing coming whispering down for some minutes before all was still, but only for the silence to be broken by a curious rustling sound, and Lance caught sight of the rope uncoiling as it fell.

“Up with you,” said the man with the lantern, and Old Poltree’s second son seized the rope, and by its help climbed up in much less time than his brother; while Lance longed for his turn to come that he might hurry away, but felt an unwillingness to go before the woman with them was saved.

“Come on,” was whispered, and the other man gave the lantern to Mother Poltree, while the shouting and splashing at the cavern entrance grew fainter.

In a very short time there was another summons from above, but at this moment they were joined by big Billy Poltree.

“All right, mother,” he said. “Mouth’s pretty well covered. I’ll go next, so as to help pull you up. They can’t get in now.”

The man seized the rope, and as he disappeared in the dark crack Lance thought of the consequences if the King’s men came now and seized them, so that he started round guiltily when he heard a sound behind him; but it was only the old fisherman.

“Hullo, young squire,” he said; “not gone? Well, I’ll go next, and then I can help with you both.”

With a display of agility that was wonderful in so old and heavy a man, he directly after seized the rope and

climbed up, leaving Lance with the old woman, who stood silently holding the lantern and gazing back.

"Tide's right over the mouth now," she said.

"Is it?" replied Lance; and anxiously, "Pray tell them all, Mother Poltree, that I didn't betray them. I wouldn't do such a thing."

"Needn't tell 'em, my son," said the old woman. "No one would believe it of you. But it's a bad job for us if they catch my folk. It means sending 'em across the seas. Now, then, up with you, quick; and then I'll douse the light."

"No, you first," said Lance.

"Nay, my son, you. Don't waste time. They ought to be making for the moors by now."

Lance seized the rope and climbed actively, finding plenty of foothold, and soon after reaching the open air in the spot which he felt sure was where he had heard the splashing and thrown down the stone.

"Now quick, boys," whispered Old Poltree. "She's got the rope fast round her I can feel. Haul steady; give her time; and then we must make for the hills. They won't hurt the women."

"Quick! this way; I can hear them," cried a familiar voice out of the darkness, and from two ways there was a rush of footsteps and a scrambling sound.

Lance made a dart to dash away, but some one flung his arms about him, lifted him from the ground, and rolled with him over and over amongst the furze and brambles.

"Keep still," whispered a voice in his ear; and he lay quiet, for it was Hezz listening to the sounds of struggling and pursuit till they died away, and then he rose.

"Don't say naught to me, Master Lance—I'm too bad; but you keep close to me and I'll show you how to get back to the big house without the King's men ketching of you. Quick! here's one of 'em."

This on hearing a hoarse panting, but a voice whispered—

“Hezz!”

“You, mother! Got up?”

“Yes, my son, with all the skin off my hands. Have they got away?”

“I think so, mother. What are you going to do?”

“Get home to tell the girls. And you?”

“See Master Lance safe, and then get hid somewheres till they’re all gone. I shall be all right, and they won’t hurt you. Come on, Master Lance.”

No more was said, Lance having his work to do in climbing after his companion, who led him by what by daylight he would have considered to be an impossible path; but it ended at the stone wall which bordered the cliff part of the home grounds, and when he began to thank his companion he was gone, only a faint rustling as of a rabbit telling of which way.

Ten minutes later Lance had climbed back to his bedroom window, closed it, and after regaining his breath he stole out into the passage to make his way to his cousin’s room.

But all was silent there. Alf had not returned.

Lance crept back to his own bedroom, undressed, and lay down to listen for his cousin’s return, undecided as to what he should do.

Nature decided it for him, sending him off fast asleep, wearied out by his exertions; but before dawn his door was opened and a light step crossed the floor and paused by his bedside, a low ejaculation as of astonishment being heard, and then the steps were directed to the door, which was softly closed.

CHAPTER V

LANCE made his appearance at breakfast the next morning rather late, and as he entered the room, wondering whether his father knew of the events of the night, he saw at a glance that everything had come out, for the squire was speaking angrily to Alfred, who stood before him with his



“Oh,” he cried, “there you are, sir!”

face cut and scratched, and a great piece of sticking-plaister across one hand.

“You may have considered it your duty, sir, still I think it was very dishonourable of Captain Barry to make use of you as his spy without a word to me; but of course he would know that I should not countenance such a thing. It is quite time you went away from home, sir; so prepare yourself, and you will go to one of the big

grammar schools as soon as you can make arrangements. That will do, sir : I do not want to hear another word. I am a magistrate, and I want to uphold the law, but all this business seems to me cowardly and bad.—Oh," he cried, "there you are, sir !"

"Yes, father," said Lance, drawing a deep breath.

"You know, I suppose, that the King's men have found a nest of smugglers here, under my very nose ?"

"Yes, father."

"And you were in bed all night, of course ?"

"No, father. I found out by accident that Alf was going to betray them."

"Betray, eh ? And pray how ?"

"He burnt blue lights at the top window as a signal to bring the French lugger ashore."

"Indeed ! Worse and worse," cried the squire angrily.

"And you, sir—pray what did you do ?"

"Went and told Old Poltree and his lads to look out."

"You did, eh ?"

"Yes, father."

"And pray why ?"

"Because, father," said the boy boldly, "I thought it was such a shame."

"You hear this, my dear ?" said the squire, turning to Mrs. Penwith.

"Yes, love," said that lady, looking at her son with tearful eyes.

"And I am a magistrate, and my son behaves like this ! 'Pon my word, this is supporting the law with a vengeance. But here's breakfast. I'll think about it, and see what I ought to do."

But the squire was so taken up with a visit from the commander of the cutter, which had made its appearance off the point that morning, and going down and seeing the clearing out of the cave, in which there was a grand haul for the sailors, that he apparently forgot to speak to

his son. He had no prisoners brought before him, for the smugglers had all escaped ; and when Mrs. Penwith told him with a troubled face that their two boys had met at the bottom of the garden, quarrelled, and fought terribly, he only said —

“Which whipped?”

“Lance, my dear. Alfred is terribly knocked about.”

“Oh,” said the squire, and that was all.

A month passed away before Hezz was seen back at the cottage, and oddly enough that was the very day on which Alfred said good-bye to the place and was driven off with his box, his cousin going with him to the cross roads six miles away, where he was to meet the Plymouth waggon ; and it was on Lance’s return that he strolled to the cliff to look down at the cottage, and saw Hezz below on the sands once more tarring his boat.

CHAPTER VI

THE cliff and the little harbour beneath looked as beautiful as ever ; but there was an element of sadness about the place whenever Lance went down to see Hezz, for he was pretty sure to encounter one or other of the sad-faced women busy in some way or another.

There was no playtime for Hezz, whose big, open, boyish face had grown old and anxious-looking ; but he always had a smile and a look of welcome for Lance whenever he went down, and rushed off to get the boat ready for a fishing trip somewhere or another.

But these were not pleasure excursions, for as soon as the boat was pushed off the two lads tugged at the oars or set the sail to run off to some well-known fishing ground, where they worked away in a grim earnest way to get together a good maund of fish, a part of which was

always sold up at the "big house," and at a good price too.

As for the women, they worked hard in their patches of garden, or went out in couples to bait and lay the lobster pots, or set the trammel nets, sometimes successfully, more often to come back empty; but somehow they managed to live and toil on patiently with a kind of hopeful feeling that one day things would mend.

"Ever see any of the French smugglers now, Hezz?" said Lance to him one day.

The boy's eyes flashed, and he knit his brows.

"No," he said, in a deep growl, for there had been no squeak in his voice since the night of the fight; the last boyish sound broke right away in that struggle, and he seemed to have suddenly developed into a man. "No," he said, "nor don't want to. If it hadn't been for them the old man and Billy and t'others would ha' been at home, 'stead o' wandering the wide world over."

"Have you any idea where they are, Hezz?"

The lad looked at him fiercely.

"Want to get 'em took?" he growled.

"Of course," said Lance, smiling. "Just the sort of thing I should do."

"Well, I didn't know," said Hezz.

"Yes, you did," cried Lance. "Want me to kick you for telling a lie?"

"Well, you're a young gent, and young gents do such things. Look at your cousin."

"Now, just you apologise for what you said, or I'll pitch into you, Hezz," cried Lance. "Now then: is that the sort of thing I should do if I knew where the old man and the rest were?"

"No," said Hezz, grinning, "not you."

"Then just you apologise at once."

"Beg your pardon, grant your grace, wish I may die if I do so any more. That do?"

"Yes, that'll do. Now tell me where they are, just to show me you do trust me."

"Tell you in a minute, Master Lance," cried the lad earnestly, "but I don't know a bit. We did hear from a Falmouth boat as some un' had sin 'em up Middlesbro' way after the herrin'; but that's all, and p'raps they're all drowned. I say, I'll tell you something, though. What d'yer think my old woman said about your mother?"

"I don't know. What did she say?"

"Said she was just a hangel, and she didn't know what she should ha' done all through the stormy time if it hadn't been for her."

"Oh, bother! I didn't want to hear about that," said Lance hurriedly.

"But you ought to hear, and so I telled you. I say, what's gone of your cousin?"

"Never you mind. What is it to you?" said Lance roughly. "You don't want to see him again."

"Nay, I don't want to see him, Master Lance, 'cause I might feel tempted like; and I don't want to run again' him, it might make me feel mad."

"Ah, well, you won't feel mad, Hezz, for he is never likely to come back here again. He's at a big school place, and going to college soon."

"Well, I'm glad he isn't likely to come; not as I should fly out at him, but Billy's wife right down hates him, and there's the other women do too, for getting their lads sent away. You see they've the little uns to keep; and Billy's wife says to me, on'y las' Sunday as we come back along the cliffs from church with the little gal, 'Hezz,' she says, and she burst out crying, 'it's like being a lone widow with her man drowned in a storm, and it's cruel, cruel hard to bear.'"

"And what did you say, Hezz?"

"Nothin', Master Lance. Couldn't say nothing. Made me feel choky and as if my voice was goin' to

break agen; so I give her luttel gal a pigaback home, and that seemed to do Billy's wife good. Hah, I should like to see our old man home agen, for it's hard work to comfort mother sometimes when I come back without my fish, and she shakes her head at me and says, 'Ah, if your father had been here!'"

"Poor old lady!" said Lance.

"You see, it's when she's hungry, Master Lance. She don't mean it, 'cause she knows well enough there was times and times when the old man come back with an empty maund; but then you see she'd got him, and now it's no fish and no him nayther.—No, I won't, Master Lance. I didn't say all that for you to be givin' me money agen."

"Well, I know that, stupid. It's my money, and I shall spend it how I like. It isn't to buy anything for you, but for you to give to the old woman."

"Nay, I won't take it. If you want to give it her, give it yourself. I arn't a beggar.—Yes, I am, Master Lance—about the hungriest beggar I ever see."

"You take that half-crown and give it to Mother Poltree, or I'll never speak to you again."

"No, I won't. You give it her."

"I can't, Hezz; she makes so much fuss about it, and kisses me, and then cries. Seems to do more harm than good."

"I won't take it," growled Hezz, "but you may shove the gashly thing in my pocket if you like.—Thankye for her, Master Lance; it arn't for me. And look here, mind, I've got it all chalked down in strokes behind my bedroom door, and me and Billy and the old man'll pay it all back agen some day."

"All right, Hezz," said Lance merrily. "You shall; so it's all so much saved up, and when you do pay it we'll buy a new boat, regular clinker-built, copper-fastened, and sail and mast."

"That we will, Master Lance," cried the lad eagerly. "One as can sail too, so's we can hold a rope astern and offer to give t'others a tow. I say, think the old man will ever come back?"

"I hope so, Hezz."

"Ay, that's what I do—hopes. Sent over the sea, I s'pose, if they did."

"Oh, don't talk about it, Hezz!" cried Lance bitterly. "Why didn't they be content with getting a living with the fish?"

Hezz made no reply, but trudged off to the long whitewashed cottage on the cliff, where as Lance watched he saw Mother Poltree come out and Hezz hand her the big silver coin with King George's head on one side.

The result was that the brawny old woman threw her apron over her face, tore it down again and looked down below, caught sight of the giver, and began to descend.

But Lance was too quick for her: he took flight and ran below the cliff, scrambling over the rocks, for it was low tide, and had a toilsome climb up a dangerous part so as to get back home.

CHAPTER VII

It was one bright spring morning after getting well on with his Latin reading with the vicar, that Lance thought he would go down to the cliff and see what luck Hezz had had with the trammel overnight.

Suddenly he stopped short and stood staring down at the cliff shelf, hardly believing it was true, for there below him in a row stood four great pairs of stiff flannel trousers in four pairs of heavy fisherman's boots, just as if the men's wives had put them out in the sunshine against the old wooden rail to sweeten and dry out some of the damp salt, in case their wearers should come back.

But Lance Penwith had lived there too long to be deceived by such a sight as that, and uttering a cry of amazement he began trying to break his neck by a heavy fall before he arrived safely on the broad shelf, to yell out, "Ship ahoy!"

Then, and then only, did the biggest and broadest pair of trousers begin to move, and a great shaggy head turned to show a dark mahogany face fringed with stiff white hair.

"Come back!" shouted Lance; "and you too, Billy; and you two."

"Master Lahnce, lad!" cried the old man, making a grab at the boy's hand with one of his huge paws, clapping the other upon it, and working it up and down slowly as he said, "The old 'ooman's told me all about it, and I says, humble and thankful like, God bless yer!"

"And so says all on us," chorused his companions.

"That's right, my sons; that's right," growled the old man.

"But you've come back," cried Lance, trying in vain to free his hand, for the others wanted to shake it, and Billy Poltree had to be content with the left, while the other men ornamented the boy with fleshly epaulettes in the shape of a hand apiece on the shoulders.

"Ay, my lad, we've come back," said Old Poltree solemnly, "for it's weary months and months as we four has been in desert lands up the eastern parts and up the norrard coasties; but it's allus been with a long look-out for the native land as we felt as we must see once more afore we died. We bore it all as long as we could, and then we said we'd get home and see our wives and bairns, and then they might take us and send us away across the main, for it arn't been living, has it, my sons?"

There was a tremendous *No!* and plenty of answering of eagerly put questions before Lance could get away and

run panting up to where the squire and his mother were sitting at home.

"They've come back — they've come back!" he shouted, and then he stood as if struck dumb at the thought of what he had done — raced off to tell the only magistrate for miles round that the fugitive smugglers had returned as if to give themselves up.

A few questions followed, and Mrs. Penwith sat gazing



"Master Lahnce, lad!" cried the old man, making a grab at the boy's hand.

anxiously from husband to son and back again, for the same thought occurred to her as had flashed upon her boy — "What will he say?" But it was something quite different from anything they expected.

"Come back, Lance? Yes, you've come back, and the dinner is getting cold. Come along."

Lance stared.

But his father said something more before they left the table.

"So those smuggling rascals have come back? Well, I always expected they would. A nice long lesson they've had. Well, knowing what I do, I shall not take any steps unless I am obliged by pressure from Falmouth. Then, of course, I must. They are your friends, Lance, not mine; and I suppose they have quite given up smuggling."

"Yes, father," cried the boy; "Old Poltree told me, with tears in his eyes, that if he had known what was to come of it he would never have touched keg or bale. They'll never smuggle again."

"Let them prove it while they have a chance, my boy; it may tell in their favour when they are arrested and sent for trial."

"But this is a very out-of-the-way place," he said afterwards to Mrs. Penwith, "and I don't think any one will trouble them, for the matter is almost forgotten now."

"But ought you to——"

"Where's that boy?" said the squire, frowning.

Lance had rushed off again to tell his friends on the cliff how his father had taken their return.

“BY DEFAULT OF THE ENGINEER”

BY FRANKLIN FOX

LATE CAPTAIN P. & O. CO. SERVICE

Author of “Conqueror Compass,” “Frank Allreddy’s Fortune,” &c. &c.

I

“Y E’LL hae the gudeness, Mr. Williams, to be vary parteecular in having the coals trimmed in the bunkers. I’ve nae been doon in yon bunkers mysel’, and I hae nae time at this moment to gang there ; but I mind hearin’ tell that there’s something peculiar about the construction of them, so I’ll thank ye to gie your attention to the matter, as I maun gang awa’ to the office the noo.”

Mr. Williams, the second engineer, gave a rather gruff and surly response to the order of his chief, who immediately afterwards turned away and went on shore.

I, who was the third officer of the *Serampore*, upon the main-deck of which vessel the above colloquy took place, was standing in the main hatchway attending to the stowage of the cargo, and took but little heed of the circumstance at the time, though events which took place subsequently brought it to my mind.

Owing to some derangement of the Company’s lines of service in the Red Sea, it had been necessary to bring forward for immediate duty the old *Serampore*, a side-wheeler, which, in consequence of the recent introduction of screw-steamers into our fleet, was beginning to be classed amongst the obsolete ones. Orders had been given by

the agent at Bombay, where the ship was lying, to have the vessel got ready for sea at once and despatched to Aden and Suez, where her services were required to take the place of another ship in the regular line of Eastern communication.

The captain, officers, and engineers had all been hurriedly selected from other vessels and appointed to this ship, the second engineer having been the only officer in charge while she was laid up. He had expected, with much confidence, that he would have been made chief engineer in the event of the ship being wanted again, and, no doubt, felt a considerable soreness at a chief engineer from another ship being put over his head.

At this moment the chief officer called out to me—

"Have you got much more room there, Hardy? There are two more boat-loads of stuff coming alongside now."

"Yes, plenty of room, sir," replied I, and was soon busily engaged in superintending the safe stowage of boxes of tea, cases of indigo, and the other articles that composed our cargo. On the upper deck there was a constant stream of coolies shooting the baskets of coal down into the bunkers on both sides of the deck, through the small round holes which had been made for that purpose, and which were fitted with iron plates for covers let in flush with the deck, when closed.

From the fact that such a ship as the old paddle-steamer *Serampore* was still available for service, it will be readily understood that the incidents I am about to relate did not happen yesterday. In fact it was before the days when the Suez Canal was opened; and consequently, when it was known in Bombay that an extra P. & O. ship was put upon the berth, several officers and others who had come from up country, and were waiting for the regular mail to start to England, seized this opportunity, with the idea of getting a few more days in Egypt than they would otherwise have been able to secure.

In due time the *Serampore* was coaled and her cargo all in, so she slipped her moorings at Masagon and took up her berth off the Apollo Bunder, where her passengers were to join her. As it was in the end of the month of July, we anticipated meeting the south-west monsoon in its greatest force, and had prepared for this by sending down all the *Serampore's* upper spars, lowering the topmasts half-



"A quiet smoke."

way down the lower masts, the backstays being "snaked" across and across the fore and main rigging on both sides, while the fore and main yards only were kept up aloft, and the trysail gaffs, with their respective sails.

The *Serampore*, as it was the fashion with steam-ships of that period, had a goodly show of top hamper when she was all a-taunto, and stripped in the manner which I have

just described, she appeared, in my eyes, to present a melancholy aspect, something like a skinned rabbit. But as I had only recently been enjoying sea life as a midshipman in a large sailing-ship, that fact may excuse the comparison in which I indulged as to her appearance.

We were to sail next morning at nine o'clock, and the evening was passed by the chief and second officers and myself in a quiet smoke and a chat about things in general.

"What's the new skipper like, Mr. Urquhart?" said the second officer; "do you know anything of him?"

"Oh yes," replied the chief officer, "I think he's a very nice fellow."

"What's his name, sir?" said I.

"Skeed," replied the chief officer. "He was in the Navy once. I believe his nickname there was 'Donkey Skeed.'"

"'Donkey' Skeed?" said I, laughing; "what, on account of anything in his appearance?"

"Oh no; not on account of his ears," replied the chief, "but on account of his obstinacy. When he once gets an idea in his head, nothing in the world will ever knock it out of him."

"Where did you hear all this?" said the second mate.

"Oh, I remember hearing about him at home from a naval man I knew who was messmate with him on the West Coast."

"Well," said the second officer, "there isn't much to be obstinate about at present, except fighting the south-west monsoon."

"Exactly," replied Urquhart; "and from what he said to me to-day that's just the very thing he's got in his head. He's got a new idea, he says, which he is going to try."

"What is it?" said the second officer and I simultaneously.

"Well, he thinks that, instead of steering a direct

course for Aden right in the teeth of the monsoon, it would be better policy to edge away across the Arabian Sea on a nor'-west course, making the monsoon a leading wind, because he declares it his opinion that on the Arabian coast the monsoon will be either much lighter or have drawn more to the southward."

"What did you say to that?"

"Oh, I said I thought it might be so, but that we should have to traverse considerably more distance; to which he replied that the speed at which the ship would travel under the improved conditions of weather would make up for that."

"I'm not at all sure about it," said the second officer.

"Nor I," said Mr. Urquhart. "But I believe he's going to try it this voyage anyhow. Good-night, you fellows; I'm going to turn in."

Early next morning several bunder-boats came alongside. The bunder-boats of Bombay, I may mention, are the most convenient water-carriages possible, and very suitable for the wet and blowy weather prevailing in the monsoon. They are large, roomy boats, with a covered-in cabin in the after-part, capable of holding four or five people comfortably. They are rigged with two short masts and a *patémar*, or lateen sail, and carry a strong crew. The first passengers to appear were two ladies, two children, and an ayah. These proved to be Mrs. Woodruff, her sister Miss Reed, and her two children, the lady having been ordered home from Allahabad, where her husband's regiment was stationed, on account of her health. A captain and subaltern of the same regiment, invalided; then two officers, Captains Thompson and Shaw, from Poonah, with their wives, going home on furlough; a professor from the university, named Spiller; and two more ladies, wives of civil servants, made up the number. While the fourth officer was busy looking after the bag-

gage, and before he had well got it out of the gangway, the quartermaster of the watch called out—

"Look out, sir ; captain's coming alongside."

"Shove that bunder-boat off, out of the way ! Clear the gangway there !" and in another minute the *Serampore's* white gig flashed up alongside, and Captain Skeed sprang up the accommodation ladder.

All of us on deck saluted him, and turning hastily to the chief officer, he asked—

"Have you ordered steam, Mr. Urquhart, for nine o'clock ?"

"Yes, sir."

"The ship appears to be down by the stern. Isn't she, Mr. Urquhart ?"

"I believe she is, sir, a little. The carpenter hasn't given me the draught this morning."

"She appeared to me, as I pulled off in my gig, to be eight or nine inches at least, if not more."

"I thought she would do better in monsoon weather a little by the stern, but I'd no idea she was as much as that, and there's nothing in the cargo stowage that I'm aware of to account for it," said the chief officer.

"Well, I don't know that it matters very much," rejoined the captain ; "at all events, we can't alter it now. See everything ready for slipping from the buoy at nine o'clock. Now we'll have breakfast," added he, as eight bells struck. "Has the purser come off with the ship's papers yet ?"

"Not yet, sir ; but he's been gone some time. I expect he'll be here every minute," replied Mr. Urquhart, as they entered the saloon together.

At the appointed hour the *Serampore* slipped from her buoy, and steaming away through the shipping at anchor, soon passed the light vessel, and leaving Colaba lighthouse on her quarter, began to breast the heavy seas and face the rain and spray that the fierce monsoon blast



"This is a pleasant prospect."

drove against her. In half-an-hour's time nothing was visible but the white-capped waves pounding against her

bows, dimly seen at times through the thick driving rain that enveloped her, as it were, in a dreary and isolated world of her own.

"This is a pleasant prospect," thought I to myself, as I buttoned up my oilskins and ascended the bridge ladder to relieve Mr. Urquhart at eight o'clock.

"Keep her west-sou'-west," said that officer, "and call the captain if there is any change."

"All right, sir," said I. "What's she going?"

"Five and a half," replied the chief officer; "twelve revolutions. Keep a good look-out for ships, Mr. Hardy."

"Ay, ay, sir," said I. "There's one comfort, that we can't change to much worse weather than we've got."

"No," said he with a laugh, as the *Serampore* buried her broad bows right up to the heel of her bowsprit, over an extra heavy sea.

The chief officer and his satellite, the fourth, who kept watch with him, after divesting themselves of their oilskins, betook themselves to the comfortable and well-lighted saloon, where such of the ladies and gentlemen as had not succumbed to the influences of the weather and the diving of the ship, were endeavouring to get up a show of sociability; though not even Miss Reed, who had struck me at dinner as being a lively, agreeable, and pretty person, had courage enough to attempt a performance on the piano.

"I wonder how many days we're in for of this," thought I to myself, as I paced the bridge, the pitching of the vessel jerking me against the rail at every other step. "Let me see—it's about 1700 miles to Aden, I think. At the rate we're going, we shall have nearly a fortnight of this. It's enough to make one savage;" and to relieve my feelings, I immediately yelled out to the two look-out men who were on the forecastle (Lascars, of course)—

"*Koop dek agle*" ("Good look out forward").

"*Acha, sahib*" ("Very well, sir"), came back like a shot from the men on duty, who were getting soused every now and then by the seas that broke over the bows.

The night was dark as well as thick. The wind howled shrilly through the *Serampore's* rigging, giving me a melancholy accompaniment to my march backwards and forwards across the bridge platform. I kept a bright look-out for any ships that might be about, as we were just now in the track of vessels bound up to Kurrachee or the Persian Gulf, and I knew that there would be scanty time to do anything to avoid a collision should we chance to meet one. Nothing, however, happened to disturb the dull monotony of what sailors would describe as a regular pile-driving business.

At eight bells (midnight) I was glad to deliver up my charge to Mr. Sinclair, the second officer, and betake myself to my comfortable cabin and repose, which not even the staggering and pitching of the *Serampore*, nor the dash of the spray and rain against my cabin, which was on deck, could disturb.

The next day the weather seemed to be, if possible, worse than it was when we started. The seas were heavier and more irregular, and the wind seemed to blow even harder than it had done. During my forenoon watch the log only showed five knots an hour, and the sky was so thick with rain and mist that we got no sights. Some of the passengers made their appearance on deck, and tried to take constitutionals, pacing fore and aft the raised quarter-deck, but soon gave the attempt up as hopeless, and went below to amuse themselves with books or chess, cards or conversation.

My night watch was only a repetition of previous experience, and I fear it would tire my readers if I favoured them with a longer description of the wind, the sea, and the weather. It is necessary to make a voyage in the south-west monsoon before any one can quite realise what

it means. The best description of it I can give in a few words is, a lengthened duration of a south-west gale in the English Channel, with thick weather and a temperature of about seventy-five or eighty degrees.

On the fourth day out, I was keeping the forenoon watch as usual, and had left the bridge for a moment or two to compare the standard with the binnacle compasses, and as I passed the saloon companion, which had a hood over it facing aft, I saw Miss Reed with one of her sister's little girls standing at the top of the ladder. Of course I lifted my cap and wished her good-morning.

"Do you think we shall have any better weather soon, Mr. Hardy?" she asked. "I've been watching those great seas shoot up under the stern of the ship, and they do look so cruel and savage that it positively frightens one."

"I'm afraid there's not much chance of any real improvement till we get to Aden," said I; "but there's nothing that you need be frightened about, for the old ship is as sound as a bell, and is fighting her way on as well as we could expect under the circumstances."

"My sister's a very poor sailor," said she, "and I don't believe she'd have come if she had thought it was going to be anything like this."

I had taken a step aft towards the binnacle, remembering that I was in charge of the deck, and that talking to passengers on duty was not exactly in harmony with the Company's regulations, when the *Serampore*, after making a moderate dive, encountered an unusually heavy sea, which threw her nose up into the air, as it were, and Miss Reed, having for the moment relaxed her hold upon the companion-rail, was, with the child, shot out upon the deck as if she had been flung by a gigantic catapult. The child was rolling towards the rail, where there was only a slight netting, which, if it parted, as being old it very likely might with her weight, would leave nothing between



“Caught a firm grip of her dress.”

her and the raging sea beneath, when I made a desperate bound forward and caught a firm grip of her dress. At the same time swinging myself round, I was able with my left arm to arrest the headlong rush of Miss Reed against the corner of the skylight, towards which she was helplessly thrown. But the impetus with which she was flung was so great that I could only save myself from falling by pressing my back against the skylight.

In a minute she recovered herself, and seizing the child in her arms, she gave me a grateful look, and murmuring her thanks, allowed me to hand her down the companion.

I had scarcely done this when Captain Skeed popped his head out of his cabin door.

“Send for the chief officer and chief engineer, if you please, Mr. Hardy.”

“Ay, ay, sir. Quartermaster, tell Mr. Urquhart and Mr. Stewart that they are wanted by the captain.”

In a few minutes both those officers were closeted with Captain Skeed.

As I resumed my walk on the bridge, I confess I felt some curiosity to know what the subject of the colloquy going on in the captain’s cabin might be, for I was sure that something or other of importance must be under discussion. I had not long to wait for one result, at all events, of the deliberations. Directly we made it twelve o’clock, and the second officer had handed in to the captain the ship’s position by dead reckoning, for we had seen neither sun, moon, nor stars since we left Bombay, I received orders to alter the course.

“Keep her away to west-north-west, Mr. Hardy,” shouted the captain from the quarter-deck; “and set the fore and aft sails with a single reef in them.”

“Port four points, quartermaster,” said I; “keep her west-north-west. *Serang, sub adimee seeah carro seede mar*” (“Boatswain, pipe all hands make sail”),

In a few minutes the trysails were opened out, the reef points tied, and the sails set, together with the fore top-mast staysail. The monsoon was blowing from about southwest by south, so that with the sheets hauled flat aft they were just clean full, the luffs only lifting a little as the ship dived over the heavy seas. The alteration in the course brought the sea much broader on the *Serampore's* bow, some of the waves, in fact, coming nearer her beam than her bow, but the canvas steadied her greatly. She only shipped half the quantity of water that she had been doing, and although her progress was not greatly accelerated, she went along much more steadily and comfortably than she had done hitherto. As soon as the sails were set and the men piped to dinner, Sinclair came up on the bridge to relieve me.

"What was the council of war about? Did Urquhart tell you?" asked I.

"Oh yes," replied Sinclair; "the captain's determined to try his plan of making the Arabian coast where the wind will help him, and then steaming up along the land to Aden. From what Urquhart said, he wanted to be sure about the coals, as we shall have a considerably longer distance to cover by the new route."

"I hope he hasn't made a mistake," said I; and leaving Mr. Sinclair in charge, I went off to work up the day's reckoning and have my lunch.

For the next five or six days the *Serampore* was kept on the same course with the same canvas set; and it certainly appeared that the captain's theory was an accurate one, for as we approached the coast of Arabia the monsoon blew rather less fiercely, and favoured our progress a little more, so that the *Serampore* had been making six and six and a half knots by the log, instead of five and five and a half as she had been making before the course was altered.

On the forenoon of the tenth day from our leaving Bombay the weather cleared up a little just before noon,

as it frequently does, and gazing intently ahead, I fancied that I could see through the haze of rain that still remained, a darker appearance ahead than there would be with mere mist. At this moment the captain came up on the bridge. I pointed this out to him at once, exclaiming—

"That looks remarkably like the land to me, sir."

"So it does, Mr. Hardy," said the captain. "Unless I'm very much out in my reckoning, we ought to make Gebel Camar, or the Mountains of the Moon, as they are called, very soon, and probably what you see is really the land."

At this moment Mr. Stewart, the chief engineer, came up the bridge ladder in an excited and hasty manner. A glance at his face told me, before he opened his lips, that something was wrong.

"Captain Skeed, I've just made the discovery that the large pockets in both the foremost bunkers are empty, and we haena got more than a few hours' steaming in the ship."

"Good heavens! Why you told me the other day that we had eight or ten days' full steaming in the ship."

"I know I did, sir, but I reckoned upon fifty tons in the twa pockets. It appears now that that fellow Williams, who, I may say, has behaved more like a deevil than a mon all the voyage, never fashed himsel' to see the coals trimmed into the pockets, as I gave him orders to do in Bombay."

"What does he say about it?" said the captain.

"He actually tells me that it was no his business, and I ought to hae seen to it mysel'."

"I never heard of pockets in bunkers before," said the captain.

"Nor anybody else," said Mr. Stewart. "They're just bunkers within the bunkers. Ye can't get to them frae the deck, and to fill 'em with coal it has to be passed in by the trimmers through a hole that's cut in the bulkhead."

"Confound such contrivances!" exclaimed the captain,

stamping his foot on the bridge. "Well, Mr. Stewart, we must make a sailing-ship of her, that's all. There's the land, and we shall have to keep clear of it under canvas. How long will it take you to disconnect?"

"I dinna ken, sir, that ye can disconnect the paddle-wheels at all; and anyhow, if it's possible to do it, the gear will be set as fast as a rock, for I doubt if they've been disconnected since she was built."

"If you can't disconnect, then, can you take the floats off?"

"There's muckle sea on for a job o' that sort; but maybe by lifting the paddle-flaps at the top we could take the upper ones off."

"Then keep enough steam so as to move the wheels as required, and set all your engineers to work to unscrew the bolts and take the floats off."

"Vera weel, sir," said the engineer, and in a few minutes the four engineers and the boilermaker with all the firemen mounted the paddle-boxes with spanners and hammers, and set to work unscrewing the nuts and removing the floats as fast as they could, the engines in the meantime having been stopped.

The chief officer was then summoned by the captain to commence immediately re-rigging the ship. As the top-masts had to be swayed up and fiddled, topsail-yards crossed, and top-gallant mast sent up, besides all the sails being bent to the yards, every soul of the ship's company was fully occupied for the rest of the day.

During all this time the *Serampore* was gradually drifting towards the land, which became more distinct as we approached it.

By sunset the engineers had succeeded in getting off all the floats, the engines having been turned gently to move the wheels as required, and the sailor part of the ship's company had got matters so far advanced that we were able to set reefed topsails and courses upon the

ship. The captain then summoned all of us officers to his cabin.

I could see that he had not even yet recovered from the exasperation caused him by what had taken place.

"I have sent for you all," he said, "to ask your opinions on the situation. It's no use to attempt to work the ship to Aden under canvas. I propose, therefore, to heave-to till daylight, and then run into one of the bays on the coast to leeward of us. I see there is one marked on the chart between Seger and Kalfat, near the town of Doan, and if I can make that without running up against any rocks I shall anchor the ship there. Has any one anything better to propose?"

We all said no, and the council broke up.

In accordance with the decision arrived at, the *Serampore* was hove-to for the night. At daylight next morning all sail was made on her, and with wind abaft the beam she ran in for the spot which Captain Skeed had indicated as suitable for his purpose.

The coast stood out barren and rocky, but there was a break in it visible right ahead. With the lead going, and a sharp look-out for rocks, we sailed into a small bight or bay under the lee of Seger Point, and let go her anchor in thirteen fathoms. As the cable was veered out she swung round head to wind and sea with her stern inland; but as she tautened her cable a crash sounded from aft, and we felt her stern bump upon a sunken rock.

"My God!" exclaimed Captain Skeed, "the ship is lost," and he fell upon the deck insensible. We carried him into his cabin, and the doctor was immediately summoned, but all his efforts to restore animation were unavailing. Captain Skeed was dead,

II

ALTHOUGH the position taken up by the *Serampore* was somewhat sheltered from the force of the monsoon by a projecting point of land, still there was a heavy swell in the little bight or bay where she was, which broke upon the rocky and barren shores around her with an incessant roar and clouds of spray. The swell lifted her stern again and again, causing her to strike heavily as each succeeding wave swept under her. At last with a final heavy bumping crash which carried away her after spars, she settled down upon the rocks, which were afterwards found to be the end of a reef stretching out from the land, partially visible above water at certain times of the tide.

The sudden and untimely death of Captain Skeed spread a feeling of consternation and horror through the ship, and aggravated the anxiety which the passengers felt at their situation.

Mr. Urquhart, of course, had to take the direction of affairs, and when he met the passengers at dinner he had a difficult task before him.

The ship appeared to be now fixed firmly upon the rocks at her stern, and her anchor kept her from moving in any direction. The water could be heard rushing in through the damaged plates at the stern, and in order to prevent her sinking altogether when the water filled her forward, Mr. Urquhart caused the after part of the ship to be blocked up with an old sail against the leaky places, and spare iron plates and boards wedged against it to keep the water back.

Mr. Urquhart had not been in the saloon a minute before he was assailed with questions.

"Can you tell us whereabouts we are, Mr. Urquhart? What part of the coast are we upon?" asked Professor Spiller.

"The ship is about one hundred and fifty miles south of the Kuria-Muria Islands in one direction, and between four and five hundred in the other from Aden."

"What in the name of Heaven did the captain anchor here for?" asked Captain Shaw.

"His idea was, that lying here in smoother water, he might be able to remove the ironwork of the paddle-wheels, which would render the ship unmanageable under canvas, and then he intended, I believe, either to sail her back to Bombay, or to wait until the monsoon broke, and try to reach Aden."

"Poor fellow, poor Captain Skeed, I'm sure he would have done the best thing possible," exclaimed Mrs. Woodruff.

"No doubt he was a good officer," said the professor. "But what's to be done now?"

"Of course," said Mr. Urquhart, "that plan is knocked on the head now. The ship is, to all intents and purposes, a wreck."

"What chance is there of our being seen and picked up?" asked the professor.

"Not a very encouraging one, I am afraid; there is no regular trade along this coast," replied Mr. Urquhart.

"But vessels pass this way occasionally, don't they?" said Captain Shaw.

"Sometimes country vessels, as they are called—ships that go trading about to all sorts of coast ports, in the employ of native merchants—may pass this way, bound to or from the Persian Gulf, but I can't say I know anything at all about them."

"And how about the natives?" said the professor; "are they likely to be friendly or hostile to us, do you suppose?"

"There, again, I am sorry I can give you no information; but I shall make it my business to see that we are prepared to give them as warm a reception as we can, should they attempt to molest us."

"And what is your idea that we should do eventually?" asked Captain Thompson.

"I'm afraid that we can do nothing at all at present. Fortunately we have plenty of provisions and water to last for a considerable time, and all the boats are in good condition, if the weather would permit us to make use of them. We can only prepare ourselves to resist any attack that the natives, should they be hostile, may make upon us, and keep a good look-out for any vessel that may be passing. If any of you, gentlemen, can suggest anything else, I shall be quite pleased to adopt it."

The next day Captain Skeed's body was taken on shore to be buried. Mr. Urquhart had caused a grave to be dug in the sand, near a remarkable mass of rock about some five hundred yards from the beach. Several of the passengers, and all the ship's company, attended the funeral, all the ship's boats being lowered when the time came; and after the funeral service had been read by the purser, a heap of stones of all sizes, collected by the crew, was piled upon the grave.

I cast my eyes around me as I watched this melancholy performance, but I could see nothing in the distance in the shape of a living creature. It was all a trackless waste of sand and rocks.

After we returned on board, Mr. Urquhart sent for the chief engineer, and told him to bring Mr. Williams, the second engineer, on the quarter-deck. When he appeared, Mr. Urquhart said—

"It was Captain Skeed's intention to have disgraced you from your position as second engineer, in consequence of your gross neglect in omitting to see the ship's bunkers properly filled with coal, and for your insubordinate conduct to the chief engineer."

"It was just as much Mr. Stewart's business to see to the coaling as mine," replied Williams.

"Silence if you please, sir. Under the present cir--

cumstances I do not propose to carry out the intention of the late captain; but I must tell you that entries relating to your conduct have been made in the official log-book of this ship, and that any further steps in the matter will be left to the decision of the managing directors of the Company when we are able to get away from this place. I hope, if you have an opportunity, you will endeavour to redeem your past misconduct, which has entailed such terrible consequences upon the *Serampore*, and everybody on board of her."

Mr. Williams made no reply, but turned and went below. After he had gone, Mr. Stewart remarked—

"He's nae such a bad chiel, I'm thinking, at bottom, but he was mad because he didna get the berth himsel'."

After these occurrences the days began to pass by with a dreary monotony. Every morning when I got up, it was with the expectation that something or other would happen soon, and every night when I turned in, it was with the same uneasy feeling of anticipation or dread hanging about me. Mr. Urquhart ordered the watches to be kept regularly, as if we were at sea, and during the day a look-out man was kept at the mast-head to watch for a passing sail. The mizzen-mast, with most of its gear, and the main-top mast had been carried away by the successive shocks of the ship bumping on the rocks, but everything stood forward.

The second officer was ordered to get up and examine what quantity of powder and ammunition there was in the ship. We had a stand containing a dozen muskets and also a few cutlasses, together with a dozen boarding-pikes. These were all the small-arms belonging to the ship, and there were two nine-pounder guns for signalling purposes mounted on the quarter-deck.

"Don't you think," said I, "'twould be a good plan to have some cartridges made, in case of anything happening?"

"Happy thought, Hardy," said Sinclair. "We'll get

the powder up on the saloon table, and perhaps the ladies will help us. Hold on a bit, how about the bullets?"

"Ah, lucky thing you thought of that. We must get old Stewart to put his men on to cast some for us, if we can find any lead."

I ran off immediately to hunt up the carpenter, who fortunately found a big roll of lead in the bottom of his storeroom, which was soon in the course of being transformed into bullets by some of the firemen.

I remembered also that a couple of kegs of powder for our agent at Aden had been shipped with the cargo, and these were soon got out and the contents utilised for large and small cartridges. After all this had been done, time hung heavy on our hands. Nobody seemed to be in good spirits enough to start any amusement, and a week of the most depressing inaction passed away. All this time not the vestige of a native had been seen anywhere in the vicinity of the ship.

The military men on board seemed to feel the situation almost unbearable.

"I'll tell you what it is," said Rivers, the subaltern of Colonel Woodruff's corps, to the other military passengers one morning, "I can't stand this sort of thing any longer. Let's make up a party and try and ascend that mountain there."

"I don't mind," said Captain Thompson.

"We might find something to shoot," said Captain Shaw. "We've all got our rifles with us, haven't we?"

"Yes," said Thompson; "or we might get shot at instead of shooting something."

"What are you talking of doing?" asked the professor, coming up at this moment.

"Oh! we're thinking of doing a kind of picnic up the mountain yonder. Will you join us, professor? You might be able to enrich science with specimens of the flora and fauna of this howling wilderness," said Rivers.

"I doubt if there's any great surprise for science hidden about here ; but I shall be very pleased to join the party. When is it to be ?" said the professor.

"Oh ! shall we start to-morrow ?"

"Yes, let it be to -morrow. What do you say, Thompson ?" said Shaw.

"Agreed !" cried the rest.

"Very well, then," said Rivers. "You fellows get your rifles all ready, and revolvers if you've got any, and I'll go and interview the purser for a hamper of prog. And look here, Thompson, just ask Urquhart to let young Hardy come with us, and half-a-dozen Lascars."

"To carry the game, eh, Rivers ?" .

"Just so ; we may find them useful."

"Don't you want some of the ladies to go too ?" asked Shaw.

"I've no objection, I'm sure," said Thompson.

"I think you'd better leave the women out of it," said Captain Staveley ; "I shouldn't like to have the responsibility on my mind if anything did happen, you know, and I fancy we're going to make rather a leap in the dark."

"All right," rejoined Rivers. "Then we'll start at daylight to-morrow. What do you say, you chaps ?"

Everybody agreed to this proposal ; and I shortly had a message telling me that the chief wanted me.

"There's a sporting party going out to-morrow, Hardy. You take six hands with you, armed with cutlasses, and go with the party. You must use your own discretion and act according to circumstances."

Next morning we all set off at the appointed hour, having been landed on some rocks at a little distance from the ship. The Lascars appeared to enjoy the chance of stretching their legs, and followed in the steps of the party led by Mr. Rivers, chattering like schoolboys out for a holiday.

"We'll make for that spur that sticks out seawards half-

way up the mountain," said Rivers. "I've got a compass on my watch-chain, and it bears just a little to the west of south from us, so we shall know the opposite bearing will take us back to the ship."

"That's a very sensible precaution of yours," said the professor. "How many miles do you reckon we are from the foot of the mountain?"

"Five or six miles," was the reply.

"Come on then, step out; we shall have the sun directly, and climbing will be no joke then," said Shaw.

So we all trudged along at a round pace. I had taken the precaution to bring a revolver with me that Mr. Urquhart lent me, and a fowling-piece and a pocketful of cartridges of my own.

After we had tramped along for about an hour over the sandy plain, and lost sight of the ship, which was hidden by projecting rocks, we reached the foot of the mountain, and found a sort of track which led us into a narrow gorge overhung by rocks on each side. We penetrated through this for about a quarter of a mile. At the end of it there were two tracks visible, one leading up the side of the mountain, and the other, branching to the left, seemed to lead to habitations of some kind, for the road was a beaten track, and the professor declared that he could see smoke in the air at a distance.

"Here's a parting of the ways," said Rivers. "Shall we start to ascend the mountain? Shall we follow the road, which may lead us to some habitations? or shall we sit down and have our tiffin?"

Rivers' proposals being put to the vote, that for tiffin was carried unanimously; so finding the softest stones for seats, we very soon disposed of the provender in our hamper, the Lascars refreshing themselves in their own fashion.

"Now, I think," said Rivers, "as we haven't met with anything of interest during our walk, we'd better





“Uttering a wild yell, rushed off towards the nearest hut.”

go and see if there really is a village there, and what it's like.”

Accordingly we set off upon the track leading to the left, and after a quarter of an hour's walk, turning an abrupt corner formed by a huge boulder, we came upon a number of huts clustered together. There were some palm-trees growing in the midst. No doubt this was one of the oases that are said to be dotted about the country. We had not made many more steps in the direction of the village, when a wild-looking figure, half naked, his long reddish-coloured hair standing upright on his head, darted out from behind a boulder ahead of us, and uttering a wild yell, rushed off towards the nearest hut.

“Gentlemen, let me advise all of you to look to your arms, and see they are ready for use,” said Rivers, “for we shall soon know now whether we have fallen amongst friends or foes.”

We all halted for a moment and examined our rifles and guns, and I called to the Lascars to keep close to us and be prepared to use their cutlasses at a moment's notice. A few more steps brought us amongst the huts of the village, from which men, women, and children stared at us with looks of wonder. The fellow who had first descried us still ran on ahead, and we followed him until we were in the centre of what appeared to be a considerably large settlement. He had never ceased uttering his hideous yell as he went along, and on entering an open square, which had a hut bigger than the rest on one side of it, probably the abode of the chief, a crowd of at least fifty natives, similar in appearance to the one we had first seen, but all armed with spears and matchlocks of a very ancient construction, leapt as it were from the ground, and stood in a compact body before us in front of the large hut.

As we neared them some handled their spears and some their matchlocks, and I thought that the critical moment had come when we should have to fight for our lives.

"Halt," said Rivers to our party. "Form double line," and the twelve of us drew ourselves up.

"Now, professor, you speak Arabic, don't you? Try them with a little soft sawder first, will you. We don't want to fight unless we're obliged. There isn't much to be gained by it."

The professor immediately stepped three paces in front, and calling out, "Salaam, Aleikum," addressed a sentence in Arabic to the group.

The only answer to this was a wild yell and a chatter of gibberish.

"What was it you said?" asked Rivers.

"We are friends, and want to see the chief," answered the professor. "But I can't understand a word of their talk. I fancy these people of the Seger region have a distinct dialect of their own."

"Try 'em in English," said Thompson. "Where's your chief, you silly beggars, you?"

The only response to this was another wild yell and another shower of gibberish, accompanied by a flourish of the spears.

At this instant a noise was heard from the hut in the rear of the rows of natives drawn up in front, and the line opened in the middle, when a tall grey-bearded Arab, with a long camel-hair burnoose over his shoulders, and a polished wooden spear in his hand, stepped forward a few paces.

The professor immediately addressed him with the ordinary Eastern salutation, of which the chief took but little notice, making a remark which the professor understood to mean that our presence was not welcome. Unwilling to leave matters in this unsatisfactory position, the professor harangued the chief in Arabic, uttering the most friendly sentiments, and expressing a desire to purchase dates or any commodities that his highness the sheik might have to dispose of.

I was unable to gather whether the sheik understood this speech or no. I am disposed to think that he did ; but the only answer he vouchsafed to it was to extend his spear in the direction whence we had come, and to utter three words in such an unmistakable tone of wrath and contempt that we all understood it to mean, as the professor afterwards said it did, "Infidel dogs, begone !"

After this there was nothing for it but to retreat in as good order as possible. Rivers gave the word to march, telling us to look behind us at every other step. Before we had taken three steps the sheik uttered a loud command, and the natives vanished from the square in the same rapid manner in which they had presented themselves.

As we passed by their huts we were greeted with shrill cries of derision by the women and children standing in the entrances.

From a hasty glance I threw at them the women appeared not by any means bad-looking, but very similar in character to those you may see in the native town at Aden, light copper colour, with a profusion of dark hair and large dark eyes.

As we entered the narrow defile or gorge by which we had reached the village, Rivers, who was bringing up the rear, called out to us, "Look out now, and be steady. If they're going to molest us it will be here."

The words were scarcely out of his mouth when the hideous yells, now familiar to us, arose on either side.

"Halt !" said Rivers. "Form two lines back to back facing the sides of the gorge. Make ready, they'll be on us in a minute," and as he spoke, about fifty of them on each side dashed towards us. When they were within five yards of us, Rivers gave the word to fire, and down went four or five of the leading savages on each side. This gave them a momentary check, and Rivers instantly called out, "Give 'em your second barrels, sharp."

This we did promptly, and the natives stopped and seemed as if about to fly, for our volley had done great execution.

"Now, then," said Rivers, "run for it before they recover themselves, but keep together."

As we started to run the natives hurled a shower of spears at us. One grazed Rivers' arm, making the blood come; another pierced the Lascar by my side to the heart, and the poor fellow fell dead; another went through the professor's *solar topee*, causing him to utter exclamations of rage and despair. But we pushed on as hard as we could go for the ship. The natives, we could see, hung behind us in a cloud, their numbers appearing to have been considerably augmented; they, however, took care to keep out of the range of our guns.

In an hour's time we regained the deck of the *Serampore*, the natives still following in the distance.

I rushed up to Mr. Urquhart, and in a few words explained to him what had occurred, whereupon he instantly ordered all hands to be called, and got our two nine-pounders aft loaded, and pointed towards the shore opposite the stern of the ship. The ladies behaved with wonderful coolness and courage when they heard that an attack might be expected from the natives, and offered their services as nurses or in any other way in which they might be useful.

In the meantime a great crowd of natives were assembling on the shore opposite the ship, at which their leaders were pointing and uttering wild cries of defiance. Their only means of approach was either by swimming, or by the irregular causeway that the rocks of the reef provided, and that would not admit of a large number walking abreast. After a brief pause, however, they made a forward movement, and with loud cries dashed, some through the water and some on the reef, with the evident idea of boarding the ship. Those who had matchlocks fired

them off at us, but without doing any damage. Every man in the ship for whom there was a musket, or who



"Mr. Urquhart tried the effect of the nine-pounders."

possessed a rifle or gun of any description, was employed under the second officer in picking off the men on the reef or those in the water. But as fast as they dropped

off the rocks they were replaced by others, and the numbers on shore seemed to be augmented from time to time by men coming in various directions from one knew not where.

After a time Mr. Urquhart tried the effect of the nine-pounders, which did great execution amongst the crowd; but he was obliged to be very careful, on account of the limited number of shot he had, and the not very large supply of powder. The shot we supplemented with small canvas bags of old nails and iron bolts, which made a very good substitute for grape-shot. The fight lasted under these conditions till sunset, not one of the natives having got nearer the ship than to touch her on the outside. The attack then ceased for a time, and we had leisure to refresh ourselves.

When I took my watch I could hear the sound of the multitude on shore, who would no doubt recommence the attack in the morning. The night was calm and still, for the monsoon had broken, and now only blew at intervals in moderate breezes.

I had an opportunity of exchanging a few words with Miss Reed when she came up on deck for a few moments.

"I hope you are not hurt, Mr. Hardy," she said.

"Not at all," said I. "I trust you'll keep your spirits up. I've no doubt we shall settle these fellows in the morning."

"I hope you will; and oh how I pray for a ship to come and take us away from this terrible spot!"

"Perhaps we shall see one sooner than you expect; but keep your courage up, dear Miss Reed, all will be well."

At early daylight, as the enemy was all massed together, Mr. Urquhart loaded both the nine-pounders to the muzzle with his own particular grape, and pointing them carefully into the midst of the crowd, where the leaders were to be seen, discharged both simultaneously with terrible effect, many natives being killed.

At this moment the look-out at the mast-head shouted out at the top of his voice, "Sail O! a ship in sight near the land."

"Take one of the cutters, Mr. Hardy, and pull out to that vessel. Take a flag with you to wave in the boat. Tell them our condition, and beg them to assist us and take the people off the ship."

With what eager delight and anxiety I proceeded to obey this order the reader can well imagine. As the weather was fine, and nearly calm, I succeeded, after a long pull, in getting alongside the vessel. She proved to be a "country" trader on a voyage from Bombay to Zanzibar, whence she was now on her way to Bassora. She was called the *Cowasjee Family*, and commanded by a smart young officer named Wilkinson, who willingly proffered every assistance that might be required. He brought his ship in as close to the *Serampore* as he could, and the natives having been demoralised by our fire, we proceeded to embark the passengers and crew of the *Serampore* on board his ship. He told us that it was quite a chance he was in that locality, but he had been set out of his course by a strong current. Every effort that Captain Wilkinson could make for the comfort of our passengers and crew was made, and in due time we all safely landed at Bassora. Luckily a steamer was starting the next day for Kurrachee and Bombay, in which we all took passage, and where we safely ended our eventful voyage.

It may be of interest to some of my readers to know that since I got my command Miss Reed has changed her name for mine, and that we are very happy.

There was a court of inquiry held at Bombay to ascertain the cause of the loss of the *Serampore*, and the finding of the court was that Captain Skeed and his officers were exonerated from all blame, the ship having been lost "by default of the engineer."

THE KING OF SPAIN'S WILL

By JOHN BLOUNDELLE-BURTON

CHAPTER I

I CAN tell you there was a pretty bustle around Paris that night when the news came of the downfall of the old Fox—the fox being none other than Cardinal Alberoni, who had just been turned out of Spain for his intrigues, King Philip V. having had enough of him. Not that the man, who had been a gardener's son, and a sort of buffoon once to the Duke of Parma, was so wondrous old, since in this year of grace 1719 he was but fifty-five. Only, when a man is a scheming knave, who has passed his full prime, and is also a fox—why, one generally calls him an old one.

Now, the news of Alberoni's disgrace at Madrid came first to us at Versailles, just about four of the afternoon, what time we of the Grey Musketeers were going off duty, our place till midnight being taken by those of the cavalry regiment of Vermandois, which had arrived a week ago from Blois—came at the hands of the Comte St. Denis de Pile, who had been sent off post-haste to Paris with the information, and also with another piece of intelligence, at which, I protest, not one of us could help laughing, serious enough though the thing was. This news being none other than that the crafty old Italian, who was on his way to Marseilles, there to embark with all his wealth for his native land, had absolutely carried off in his possession the will of the late King of Spain, Charles II.,

in which he bequeathed his throne to the very man who now sat upon it.

"And," exclaimed St. Denis de Pile, as he drank down a flask of Florence wine which we produced for him in the guard-room, "I'll be sworn that he means to send that will to the Emperor of Austria, who, if he is not a fool, will at once destroy it. And then, poof! poof! poof!" and the Count blew out his moustache in front of his lip, "what becomes of all that we fought for in the War of the Succession? *Tête de mon chien!* it will have to begin all over again. Your countrymen, my boy," and he slapped me affectionately on the shoulder, for we had met often enough before, "your countrymen, the English, will want another war, King George may be willing enough to oblige them, and the Treaty of Utrecht may as well be used to light a fire."

Now here was what some of my countrymen call a pretty kettle of fish. Peace was expected to be proclaimed in Europe at this moment, since the war of the Pyrenees was over. France and England were sworn allies and bosom friends, otherwise be sure that I, an Englishman, young and enthusiastic, would not have been holding the commission of a cornet in the Musketeers, and serving the Regent, or, rather, the boy king for whom he ruled. And all in a moment it was just as likely as not that that war might break out again through the craftiness of the Cardinal, who, since he had fallen, evidently did not mean to do so without pulling others down with him. For Austria had never willingly resigned her claims on the throne of Spain, remembering that the old French King had once formally waived all the claims of his own family to it, Will or no Will, and had then instantly asserted them on the death of Charles; while for my country—well! we English are not over fond of retreating from anything we have undertaken, though, for widely-known considerations not necessary to set down here, we

had at last agreed to that peace of Utrecht, our having thoroughly beaten the French by sea and land before we did so, being, perhaps, the reason why we at last came in.

"What's to be done?" said old D'Hautefeuille now, who was in command of the Grey Musketeers at this time.

"What? What? *Le Débonnaire* is at the Palais Royal—he must know the news at once. De Pile, you must ride on to Paris."

"*Fichtre* for Paris!" exclaimed the Count. "I am battered enough already with my long ride. Think on't—from Madrid! Through storms and burning suns, over mountains and through plains, over two hundred leagues and across half a score of horses' backs. Also, observe—the letter is inscribed to the Regent's Grace at Versailles. I have done my duty——"

"But——"

"No 'buts,' D'Hautefeuille. My work is done. Let the King's lieutenant of Versailles, who commands in his and the Regent's absence, take charge of the paper. For me a bottle and a meal, also a bed."

"Then take it to the lieutenant," said fiery D'Hautefeuille; "hand it to him yourself, and bid him find a courier to Paris. *Peste!* you, a royal messenger who can ride from Madrid here, and yet cannot finish the journey to Paris! Bah! go and get your bottle and your bed—and much good may they do you."

Whereon the old fellow turned grumpily away, bidding some of the younger ones amongst us not to be loitering about the galleries endeavouring to catch the eyes of the maids of honour, but, instead, to get off to our quarters and be ready to relieve the officers of the Vermandois regiment at midnight.

Yet, one amongst us, at least, was not to hear the chimes of midnight summoning us to the night guard, that one being myself, as you shall see. Nay, not one hour later was to ring out from the palace clock ere, as

luck would have it, I was called forth from my own quarters—or rather from the little salon of Alison de Prie (who was a maid of honour, and who had invited me in to partake of a *pâté de bécasse* which her father had sent her from his property near Tours) by an order to attend on D'Hautefeuille in his quarters.

Whereon I proceeded thither and found him in a very bad temper—a thing he suffered much from lately, since he also suffered from a gout that teased him terribly. Then, immediately, he burst out on my putting in an appearance.

"Now, Adrian Trent, it is your month of special service, is it not?"

"It is, monsieur," I answered, wondering what was coming next.

"So! very well. Here then is something for you to do—that is, if the turning of my officers into couriers and post-boys and lackeys constitutes 'special service.' However, three creatures have to obey orders in this world, soldiers, wives, and dogs, therefore I—and you—must do so. Here, take this," and he tossed to me across his table a mighty great letter on which was a formidable red seal—"have your horse saddled and be off with you to Paris. Give it into the Regent's hand. It is the account of Alberoni's disgrace which that *fainéant* De Pile could bring all this way, but no farther. Away with you! The King's lieutenant seems to think that De Pile is discharged of his duty here. Away with you! What are you stopping for? You know the road to Paris, I suppose? You ought to. It's hard enough to keep you boys out of it if I give you an afternoon's leave. Be off!"

So off I went, and five minutes afterwards my best grey, La Rose, was saddled, and I was riding swiftly towards where the Regent was at the present moment.

Now, who'd have thought when I went clattering through Sèvres and Issy, on that fine winter afternoon, in all the bravery of my full costume—which was the hand-

somest of any regiment in France, not even excepting our comrades of the Black Musketeers—who'd have thought, I say, that I was really taking the first steps of a long, toilsome journey, which, ere it was ended, was to bring me pretty near to danger and death? However, no need to anticipate, since those who read will see.

An hour later I was in Paris, and then, even as I went swiftly along amidst the crowds that were in the streets, especially in those streets round about the Palais Royal, I found that one thing was very certain, namely, that though I might be now carrying on De Pile's message from the Court of Spain to the Court of France, the purport of it was already known. Near the Palais Royal were numerous groups gathered, who cheered occasionally for France and England, which did me good to hear; then for Spain and France, which did not move me so much; while, at the same time, I distinctly heard Alberoni's name mentioned, with, attached to it, expressions and epithets that were anything but flattering. Also, as I made for the entrance opposite the Louvre, people called attention to me, saying, "*Voilà le beau Mousquetaire—chut!* doubtless he rides from Versailles. Brings confirmation of the old trickster's downfall. *Ho! le beau Mousquetaire.*" While a strident-voiced buffoon cried out to me, asking if all my gold galloon and feathers and lace did not sometimes get spoilt by the damp of the wintry weather, and another desired to know if my sweetheart did not adore me in my regimental fallals?

However, La Rosè made her way through them all, shaking her bridle-chain angrily if any got before her, breathing out great gusts from her fiery nostrils, and casting now and again the wicked white of her eye around; she was a beauty who loved not to be pestered or interfered with. And at last I was off her back, at the door near the Regent's apartments on the south side, and asking for the officer of the guard; and half-an-hour later I

was in the presence of the Regent himself, who sat writing in a little room about big enough to make a cage for a bird. Yet, in spite of the way in which his Highness spent his evenings and nights, and also of his supper parties and other dissipations, he did as much work in that little cabinet as any other twelve men in France.

Because he was a very perfect gentleman—no matter what his faults were (he answered for them to his Maker but a little while after I met him)—he treated me exactly as though I were his equal, and bade me be seated while he read the letter calmly; then, looking up at me, he said—

“I knew something of this before. Even my beloved Parisians know of it—how *they* have learnt it Heaven alone can say. Still it is known. Alberoni was to leave Madrid in forty-eight hours from the time of receiving notice. But——”

Here he paused, and seemed to be reflecting deeply. Then he said aloud, though more to himself than to me, “I wonder if he *has* got the will?”

It not being my place to speak, I said nothing, waiting to receive orders from him. And a moment later he again addressed me.

“You *mousquetaires* have always the best of horses and are proud of them. I know; I know. I have seen you riding races against each other at Versailles and Marly. And, for endurance, they will carry you far, both well and swiftly, in spite of your weight and trappings. Is it not so?”

“It is so, monseigneur,” I answered, somewhat wonderingly, and not quite understanding what way this talk tended.

“How fast can you go? Say—a picked number of you—ten—twenty—go for two days?”

“A long way, monseigneur. Perhaps, allowing for rest for the animals, nearer forty than thirty leagues.”

“So! Nearer forty than thirty leagues. ’Tis well.”

Here he rose from his chair (I, of course, rising also), turned himself round, and gazed at a map of France hanging on the wall; ran, too, his finger along it from the Pyrenees in the direction of Marseilles, while, as he did so, he muttered continually, yet loud enough to be quite audible to me—

“He would cross there—there, surely. Fifteen days to quit Spain, two to quit Madrid—seventeen altogether.



“Ran his finger along a map of France.”

From the fifth. The fifth! This is the twelfth. Ten days still.”

Then he continued to run his finger along the coast line of the Mediterranean until it rested on Marseilles, at which he stood gazing for some time. But now he said nothing aloud for me to listen to, though it was evident enough that he was considering deeply; but at last he spoke again.

“His Eminence must be met and escorted—yes,

escorted — that is it — escorted in safety through the land. Ay, in safety and safely. He must not be molested nor—" while, though he turned his face away to gaze at the map again, I would have been sworn that I heard him mutter—"allowed to depart quite yet." Then he suddenly said, "Do you know the house of the Chevalier de Marcieu? It is in the Rue des Mauvais Garçons."

"I know the street, monseigneur. I can find the house."

"Good! Therefore proceed there at once—the number is three—you are mounted, of course? Give my orders to him that he is to come here instantly; then return and I will give you some instructions for your commander."

Whereon I bowed respectfully as I went to the door, the Regent smiling pleasantly upon me. Yet, ere I left him, he said another word, asked a question.

"You *mousquetaires gris* have not had much exercise lately at Versailles, I think. Have you?"

"No, monseigneur, not our troop at least. The men have been but recently remounted."

"So. Very well. You shall have some exercise now. 'Twill do you good. You shall have a change of billet for a little while. In any case, Versailles is too luxurious a place for soldiers. Now, away with you to Marcieu's house and bid him come here. Return also yourself. Forget not that."

CHAPTER II

A GIRL CALLED DAMARIS

A WEEK later, or, to be exact, six days, and the troop of Grey Musketeers, commanded by Captain the Vicomte de Pontgibaud—which was the one in which I rode as cornet—was making its way pleasantly enough along the great southern road that runs down from Paris to Toulouse.

Indeed, we were very near that city now, and expected to be in it by the time that the wintry evening had fallen. In it, and safely housed for the night, not forgetting that the suppers of Southern France are most excellent and comforting meals, and that the Lunel and Roussillon are equally suited to the palate of a soldier, even though that soldier be but twenty years old ; as I was in those days, now, alas ! long since vanished.

But, ere I go on with what I have to tell, perhaps you would care to hear in a few words how I, Adrian Trent, an Englishman, am riding as *cornette* or *porte drapeau* in a *corps d'élite* of our old hereditary enemies, the French. Well, this is how it was. The Trents have ever been Royalists, by which I mean that they and I, and all of our thinking, were followers of the House of Stuart. Now, you who read this may be one of those—or your father may have been one of those—who invited the Elector of Hanover to come over and ascend the English throne, or you may be what my family and I are at the present moment, Jacobites. Never mind for that, however. You can keep your principles and we will keep ours, and need not quarrel about them. Suffice it, therefore, if I say that *our* principles have led us to quit England and to take up our abode in France. And if ever King James III. sits on— However, no matter for that either ; it concerns not this narrative.

My father was attached to the court of this King, who was just then in temporary residence in Rome—though, also, he sojourned some time in Spain—but, ere he followed his sovereign's errant fortunes, he obtained for me my guidon in the Musketeers, which service is most agreeable to me, who, from a boy, had sworn that I would be a soldier or nothing ; while, since I cannot be an English one, I must, perforce, be in the service of France. And, as I trust that never more will France and England be flying at each other's throats, I do hope that I may long

wear the uniform of the regiment. If not— But of that, too, we will not speak.

To get on with what I have to tell, we rode into Toulouse just as the winter day was coming to an end, and a brave show we made, I can assure you, as we drew up in the great courtyard of the old "Taverne du Midi," a place that had been the leading hostelry ever since the dark ages. For in that tavern, pilgrims, knights on their road to Rome and even the Holy Land, men of different armies, wandering minstrels and troubadours, had all been accustomed to repose; even beggars and monks (who paid for nothing) could be here accommodated, if they chose to lie down in the straw amongst the horses and sing a good song in return for their supper.

And I do protest that, on this cold December night, when the icicles were hanging a foot long from the eaves, and bitter blasts were blowing all around the city—the north-east winds coming from away over the Lower Alps of Savoy—you might have thought that you were back again in those days, if you looked around the great *salle-à-manger* of the tavern. For in that vast room was gathered together a company which comprised as many different kinds of people as any company could have consisted of when met together in it in bygone ages. First, there was the nobleman who, because he was one, had had erected round his corner a great screen of arras by his domestics; such things being always carried in France by persons of much distinction, since they could neither endure to be seen by the commoner orders, nor, if they had private rooms, could they endure to look upon the bare white-washed walls of the rooms, wherefore the arras was in that case hung on those walls. This great man we did not set eyes on, he being enshrouded in his haughty seclusion, but there was plenty else to be observed. Even now, in these modern days of which I write, there were monks, travellers, a fantoccini troupe, some other soldiers besides

ourselves, they being of the regiment of Perche, the intendant of the solitary lord, and ourselves. Our troopers alone numbered twenty, they having a table to themselves; while we, the officers, viz., the captain (De Pontgibaud), the lieutenant (whose name was Camier), and I (the cornet), had also a table to ourselves.

Yet, too, there was one other, and, if only from her quaint garb, a very conspicuous person. This was a girl—and a mighty well-favoured girl too—dark, with her hair tucked up all about her head; with superb full eyes, and with a colour rich and brilliant as that of the Provence rose. She made good use of those eyes, I can tell you, and seemed nothing loth to let them encounter the glance of every one else in the room. For the rest, she was a sort of wandering singer and juggler, clad in a short spangled robe, carrying a *tambour de basque* in her hand, while by her side hung a coarse canvas bag, in which, as we soon saw, she had about a dozen of conjuring balls.

"Who is that?" asked De Pontgibaud of the server, as he came near our table bearing in his hand a succulent *ragôut*, which was one of our courses—"who and what? A traveller, or a girl belonging to Toulouse?"

"Oh!" said the man, with the true southern shrug of his shoulders, "that!—*elle*! She is a wandering singer, a girl called Damaris. On her road farther south. Pray Heaven she steals nothing. She is as like to if she has the chance. A purse or even a spoon, I'll wager. If I were the master she should not be here. Yet, she amuses the company. Sings love ballads and such things, and juggles with those balls. Ha! giglot," he exclaimed, seeing the girl jump off the table she had been sitting on, talking to a bagman, and come towards us, "away. The gentlemen of the *mousquetaires* require not your company."

"Ay, but they do though," the girl called Damaris said, as she drew close to where we sat. "Soldiers like amusement, and I can amuse them. Pretty gentlemen,"

she went on, "would you like a love song made in Touraine, or to see a trick or two? Or I have a snake in a box that can do quaint things. Shall I go fetch it—it will dance if I pipe——"

"To confusion with your snake!" exclaimed the waiting man, "we want no snakes here. Snakes, indeed——!"

"Well, then, a love song. This pretty boy," and here she was forward enough to fix her eyes most boldly on me, "looks as if he would like a love song. How blue his eyes are!"

Alas! they are somewhat dim and old now, but then, because I was young and foolish, and because my eyes *were* blue, I felt flattered at this wandering creature's remark. However, without waiting for an answer, she went on.

"Come, we will have a trick first. Now," she said, pulling out three of the balls from her bag, "you hold that ball, *mon enfant*—thus," and she put one red one—the only red one—into my hand. "You have it?"

"Yes," I said, "I have it;" and, because it was as big as a good-sized apple, I closed my two hands over it.

"You are sure?"

"Certain."

"Show it then." Whereon I opened my hands again, and, lo! it was a gilt ball and not a red one that was in them.

"Show that trick to me," said a voice at my back, even as De Pontgibaud and Camier burst out a-laughing, and so, too, did some of the people in the great hall who were supping, while I felt like a fool. "Show that trick to me." And, looking round, I saw that it was the Chevalier de Marcieu who had spoken; the man to whom the Regent had sent me, and who had ridden from Paris with us as a sort of civilian director, or guide; the man from whom we were to take our orders when acting as guard to Alberoni when he passed this way, presuming that we

had the good fortune to encounter his Eminence ; he who was to be responsible for the safety of the Cardinal.

Now, he knew well enough that we of the *mousquetaires gris* did not like him, that we regarded him as a spy—which, in truth, he was, more or less—and that his company was not absolutely welcome to us. Wherefore, all along the road from Paris he had kept himself very much apart from us, not taking his meals at our table—where he was not wanted!—and riding ever behind the troop, saying very little except when necessary. But now he had evidently left the table at which he ate alone and had come over to ours, drawn there, perhaps, by a desire to witness the girl's performances.

"No," she said, "I shall not show it to you. I do not do the same trick twice. But, if you choose, I will fetch my little snake. Perhaps that would amuse *you*."

"I wish to see that trick with the red ball," said De Marcieu quietly, taking no notice whatever of her emphasis on the word "*you*." "Show it to me."

For answer, however, she dropped the balls into the bag, and, drawing up a vacant chair which stood against our table—she was a free and easy young woman, this!—said she was tired, and should do no more tricks that night. Also, she asked for some of our Roussillon as a payment for what she had done. Whereupon Camier poured her out a gobletful and passed it over to her, which, with a pretty little bow and grimace, she took, drinking our healths saucily a moment later.

Meanwhile I was eyeing this stroller and thinking that she was a vastly well-favoured one in spite of her brown skin, which, both on face and hands, was a strange colour, it not being altogether that wholesome, healthy brown which the winds and sun bring to those who are always in the open, but, instead, a sort of muddy colour, so that I thought, perhaps, she did not use to wash overmuch—which, maybe, was like enough. Also, I wondered at

the shapeliness of her fingers and hands, the former being delicate and tapering, and the nails particularly well kept. Likewise, I observed something else that I thought strange. Her robe—for such it was—consisted of a coarse, russet-coloured Nîmes serge, such as the poor ever wear in France, having in it several tears and jags that had been mended roughly, yet, all the same, it looked new and fresh—too new, indeed, to have been thus torn and frayed. Then, also, I noticed that at her neck, just above the collar of her dress, there peeped out a piece of lace of the finest quality, lace as good as that of my steinkirk or the ruffles of a dandy's frills. And all this set me a-musing, I know not why.

Meanwhile Marcieu was persistent about that red ball, asking her again and again to try the trick on him, and protesting in a kind of rude good-humour that she did not dare to let him inspect the ball, since she feared he would discover some cunning artifice in it which would show how she made it change from red to gilt.

"Bah!" she replied, "I can do it with anything else. Here, I will show you the trick with other balls." Whereon, as she spoke, she drew out two of the gilt ones and said, "Now, hold out your hands and observe. See, this one has a scratch on it; that one has none. Put the second in your hand and I will transfer the other in its place."

"Nay," said the chevalier; "you shall do it with the red or not at all."

"I will conjure no more," she said pettishly. Then she snatched up the goblet of wine, drank it down at a gulp, and went off out of the room, saying—

"Good-night, *mousquetaires*. Good-night, Blue Eyes," and, I protest, blew me a kiss with the tips of her fingers. The sauciness of these mountebanks is often beyond belief.

The chevalier took the vacant chair she had quitted,

though no one invited him to do so, his company not being desired by any of us, and Pontgibaud, calling for a deck of cards, challenged Camier to a game of piquet. As for me, I sat with my elbows on the table watching them play, though at the same time my eye occasionally fell on the spy, and I wondered what he was musing upon so deeply. But, presently, he called the drawer over to him and gave an order for some drink to be brought (since none of us had passed him over the flask, we aristocratic *mousquetaires* not deeming a *mouchard* fit bottle-companion for us), and when it came he turned his back to the table at which we sat, and asked the man a question in a low voice ; though not so low a one but that I caught what he said, and the reply too.

"Where is that vagrant disposed of?" he asked. "With those other vagabonds, I suppose," letting his eye fall on the members of the fantoccini troupe, "or in one of the stables."

"Nay, nay," the server said, "she is not here, but at the 'Red Glove' in the next street. She told me to-night that that was her headquarters until she had visited every inn and tavern in Toulouse and earned some money. Then she will go on to Narbonne."

"So! The 'Red Glove.' A poor inn that, is it not?"

Whereon the man said it was good enough for a wandering ballad-singer anyhow, and went off swiftly to attend to another order at the end of the room, while Marcieu sat there sipping his drink, but now and again casting his eye also over some tablets which he had drawn out of his pocket.

But at this time nine o'clock boomed forth from the tower of the cathedral hard by, which we had noticed as we rode in, and Pontgibaud gave the troopers their orders to betake themselves to their beds ; also one to me to go to the stables and see that all the horses were carefully bestowed for the night, since, though the troop-sergeant

had made his report that such was the case, he required confirmation of it. Wherefore I went to the end of the room, and, taking my long grey *houppelande*, or horseman's cloak (which we *mousquetaires*, because we always had the best of everything, wore trimmed with costly grey fur), I donned it, and was about to go forth to the stables when



“We are soldiers, not——”

I heard Pontgibaud's voice raised somewhat angrily as he spoke to the chevalier.

“*Fichtre* for such an arrest!” I heard him say, while the few strangers who had not gone to their beds—as most had done by now—cast their eyes in the direction where he and Marcieu were. “Not I! Body of my father! what do you take my gentlemen of the *mous-*

quetaires to be? Exempts! police! Bah! Go to La Poste. Get one of their fellows to do it. We are soldiers, not——”

“I have the Regent's orders,” Le Marcieu replied quietly, “to arrest him or any one else I see fit. And, Monsieur le Vicomte, it is to assist me that your ‘gentlemen of the *mousquetaires*’ are here in Toulouse—have ridden with me from Paris. I must press it upon you to do as I desire.”

Now, I could not wait any longer, since I had my orders from Pontgibaud to repair to the stables and see that the chargers were comfortable for the night, and as, also, I saw a glance shoot out of his eye over the other's head which seemed to bid me go on with my duty. Upon which I went out to the yard, noticing that the snow was falling heavily, and that it was like to be a hard winter night—went out accompanied by a stableman carrying a lantern.

“Give it me,” I said, taking the lamp from him, “I will go the round myself. Also the key, so that I can lock the door when I have made inspection.”

“Nay, monsieur,” he answered, “the door cannot be locked. The inn is full; other travellers' horses are in the stable; they may be required at daybreak.”

“Very well,” I replied, “in that case one of our men must be roused and put as guard over the animals; they are too valuable to be left alone in an open stable,” and, as I spoke, I thought particularly of my beautiful La Rose, for whom I had paid a hundred pistoles a year ago. Then I gave the fellow a silver piece and bade him go get a drink to warm himself with on this winter night, and entered the stable.

The whinny which La Rose gave as I went in showed me where all our horses were bestowed, and I proceeded down to the end of the stable, observing when I got there that they were all well housed for the night, and their



“Not so fast, mademoiselle, not so fast. What are you doing here?”

straw clean and fresh ; while, as the glimmer of the lamp proclaimed, they had been properly groomed and attended to. Everything was very well. Wherefore, giving my own mare the piece of sugar I had brought for her, I made for the door again, observing that Le Marcieu's red roan, a wiry but serviceable beast, was in a stall nearer to the entrance.

Then suddenly, as I raised the lantern to give a second glance at it, to my astonishment I saw the singing-girl, Damaris, dart out swiftly from near that stall and endeavour to push by me and escape through the door ; which, however, I easily prevented her from doing, since I seized her at once by the arm and held her, while I exclaimed, "Not so fast, mademoiselle, not so fast. What are you doing here ?—you, who are at the 'Red Glove' and have no business whatever in these stables."

CHAPTER III

"WHEN THE STEED HAS FLOWN"

AT first she struggled a little, then all of a sudden she took a different tack, and exclaimed, "How dare you touch me, fellow. You—a common *mousquetaire*—to lay your hands on me ! You ! you ! Let go—or——"

However, I had let go of her by now through astonishment at her impertinence. A common *mousquetaire*, indeed !—a common *mousquetaire* !—when, in all our regiment, there was scarce a trooper riding who was not of gentle blood—to say nothing of the officers.

"I may be 'a common *mousquetaire*,'" I replied, as calmly as I could, "yet, all the same, commit no rudeness to a wandering ballad-singer whom I find in the stable where our horses are ; and——"

"Why !" she exclaimed, with a look (I could see it by

the rays of the lantern) that was, I'll be sworn, as much a pretence as her words—"why! 'tis Blue Eyes. Forgive me; I thought it was one of your men—I—I—did not know you in your great furred cloak. It becomes you vastly well, Blue Eyes," and the hussy smiled up approvingly at me.

"Does it?" I said. "No doubt. Yet, nevertheless, I want an explanation of what you are doing in these stables at night, in the dark, when you are housed at the 'Red Glove';" and I spoke all the more firmly because I felt certain that she had not taken me for one of the troopers at all.

"Imbecile!" she exclaimed petulantly, and for all the world as if she was speaking to an inferior. "Imbecile! Idiot! Since you know I am at the 'Red Glove,' don't you know too that they have no stabling for us who put up there, and that the travellers' cattle are installed here? Oh, Blue Eyes, you are only a simple boy!"

"No, I don't know it!" I exclaimed, a little dashed at this intelligence; "but, pardon me, I would not be ill mannered—only—do ladies of your calling travel on horseback? I thought you wandered on foot from town to town giving your entertainments."

"I do not travel on horseback, but on muleback. There are such things as four-footed mules as well as two-footed ones, Blue Eyes. I assure you there are. And here is mine; look at it. Isn't it a sorry beast to be in company with the noble steeds of the aristocratic *mousquetaires*?"

"Oh, it's 'aristocratic' now, is it?" I thought to myself, "not 'common' *mousquetaires*," running my eye over the mule she pointed out, even as I held the lantern on high. Only, as I did so, I saw it was not a sorry beast at all; instead, a wiry, clean-limbed Pyrenean mule, whose hind-legs looked as though they could spring forward mighty fast if wanted; in truth, an animal that

looked as if it could show its heels to many of its nobler kin, namely horses. But, also, I observed that its saddle was on, and that the halter was not fastened to the rack.

"Well, you see?" she said, looking at me with her mocking smile, and showing all her pretty white teeth as she did so. "You see? Now, Blue Eyes, let me go. I am tired and sleepy, and I want to go to bed."

This being sufficient explanation of her presence in the stables, there was no further reason why I should detain her and I said she might go, while, even as I spoke, I fastened up the halter for her. After which we went out into the yard, where we bade each other a sort of good-night, I doing so a little crossly since I was still sore at her banter, and she, on her part, speaking in still her mocking, gibing manner.

"And where do you go to," she asked, "after this? Eh, Blue Eyes? I should like to see you some day again, you know. I like you, Blue Eyes," and as she spoke I wondered what impish kind of thought was now in her mind, for she was standing close to me, and seemed to be emphasising her remarks about her liking for me by clutching tight my *houppelande* in her hand.

"That," I said, "is, if you will excuse me, our affair. Good-night; I hope you will sleep well at the 'Red Glove.'" Then, because I did not want to part in anger from the volatile creature, and because I was a soldier to whom such licence is permissible, I said, "Adieu, sweetheart."

"Sweetheart!" she exclaimed, turning round on me. "Sweetheart! You dare to speak to me thus—you—you—base—" But, just as suddenly as she had flown out at me like a spitfire, she changed again, saying, "*Peste!* I forget—I am only a poor wandering vagrant. I did not mean that. I—I am sorry." And, as she vanished round the corner of the yard into the street, I heard her laugh and say softly, though loud enough, "Good-

night, Blue Eyes ; adieu — *sweetheart* ; ” and again she laughed as she disappeared.

Now, all this had taken some little time, as you may well suppose, so that the great clock of the Cathedral of St. Etienne was striking ten as I re-entered the inn and went on to the large guests'-room, or *salle*. It was empty at this time of all the sojourners in the house, except the captain, Pontgibaud, who was sitting in front of the huge fire, into which he stared meditatively while he drank some wine from a glass at his elbow.

“ All well with the horses ? ” he asked, as I went up to him. “ I thought you were never coming back. ” Then, without waiting for any explanation from me as to my absence, he said, “ We go towards the Pyrenees, by Foix, to-morrow, thereby to intercept Alberoni if we can. That fellow, that *mouchard*, Marcieu, says he is due to cross into France from Aragon. Meanwhile— ” but there he paused, saying no more. Instead, he gazed into the embers of the fire ; then suddenly, a moment or so after, spoke again. “ Adrian, ” he said, “ it is fitting I should tell you what Marcieu knows, or rather suspects, from information he has received from Dubois, who himself has received it from Madrid. Camier has been informed ; so must you be. ”

“ What is it now ? ” I asked, my anxiety aroused.

“ This. Alberoni, as Marcieu says, has all the old Spanish aristocracy on his side, simply because the King, Philippe, is a Frenchman. They are helping him—especially the ladies. Now, it is thought one of them has carried off the will of the late King Charles, and not Alberoni himself. ”

“ Who is she ? ”

“ He, Marcieu, will not tell, though he knows her rank and title. But— ” and now Pontgibaud looked round the room, which was, as I have said, quite empty but for us, then lowered his voice ere he replied — “ but—he is going

to arrest that girl called Damaris to-morrow morning," and as he spoke he delivered himself of a grave, solemn wink.

"Is he?" I said; "is he?" and then fell a-musing. For this opened my eyes to much—opened them, too, in a moment. Now, I understood her indignation at a *mousquetaire* seizing hold of her, a high-born damsel, probably of some old Castile or Aragon family, instead of a wandering stroller as we had thought her to be—understood, too, why I had seen that piece of rich lace peeping out at her throat; why her dress of Nîmes serge, which was a new one, was artfully torn and frayed. Also I understood, or thought I did, the strange colour of her face and hands, which were, I now made no manner of doubt, dyed or stained to appear dirty and weatherbeaten, and why the saddle was on her mule's back and the halter loose from the rack;—understood, I felt sure, all about it. Then, just as I was going to tell Pontgibaud this, we both started to our feet. For, outside, where the stables were, we heard a horse's hoofs strike smartly on the cobble-stones of the yard; we heard the animal break into a trot the moment it was in the street outside.

"Some one has stolen a horse from those stables," cried Pontgibaud, springing towards the door and rushing down the passage; "pray Heaven 'tis not one of our chargers."

To which I answered calmly, "I think not. There are other animals there than ours, horses and *mules* belonging to people staying at other inns. It is a traveller setting forth before the city gates are closed at midnight."

And, even as I spoke, I could not help laughing in my captain's face, as well as at the look upon it.

CHAPTER IV

ANA, PRINCESA DE CARBAJAL

WE were riding through one of the innumerable valleys which are formed by the spurs of the Pyrenees running almost from where the Pic du Midi rises up to the city of Toulouse; a valley which was bordered on either side by shelving hills that were covered with woods nearly up to their summits. And now we were looking forward eagerly to meeting his Eminence, the Cardinal Alberoni, of whose arrival in this neighbourhood we had received certain intelligence from more than one of the innumerable spies whom both the Regent and Cardinal Dubois maintained ever in this region—a region dividing Spain from France.

As for Marcieu, who, as usual, rode behind the troop, he had been in such a towering rage ever since the morning of our departure from Toulouse, and had used such violent language, that I for one had been obliged to tell him to keep a civil tongue in his head, while Pontgibaud, who was an aristocrat to the tips of his fingers as well as captain of a troop of *mousquetaires*, told him he must be more respectful in his language or altogether silent. For, as naturally you have understood, it was the girl who was pleased to call herself Damaris, and to assume the disguise of a wandering juggler and singer, who had ridden off that night on her mule, and was, no doubt, far enough away from us in the morning.

And she had got the late King of Spain's will in her pocket! of that Marcieu swore there could be no doubt—the will which, in truth, was the principal thing that brought the nations to agreeing that the Duke of Anjou should sit as King Philippe V. on the throne of Spain—the will which, if it once fell into the hands of Austria, would instantly *disappear* for ever and set all Europe

alight with the flames of war again. She had got it, and when Alberoni was searched it would not be found. Perhaps, after all, it was not strange that Marcieu's expressions were writ in a good round hand. He had missed the chance of his life!

"I know her," he stormed in the morning, when he found how abortive his attempts to arrest her had proved, "I know her. Dubois sent me intelligence of everything. She is the Princesa Ana de Carbajal, of an ancient and illustrious Catalonian house, a house faithful to all the interests of Austria before the days of Charles V. and of Philip. May the pest seize her! She came ahead of Alberoni disguised thus, and never thought she would encounter us. And I do believe she has the will in that accursed red ball. Such things have been used as hiding-places before. Even Alberoni once used his crook as a receptacle wherein to hide a slip of paper. And the late King's last will in favour of Philippe was itself but a slip of paper, signed when he was close to death." Then, again, he used strong language.

However, she was gone, and, on the frail chance of his being misinformed after all, and because he also had orders to meet Alberoni in any circumstances, and to escort him to the Mediterranean coast without allowing him to hold converse with any one, we set off to find him. For Dubois' spies had met us and said that Alberoni was on his way, that he was close at hand.

So we rode along, nearing rapidly the pass into Spain by which he was coming, and expecting every moment to meet the Cardinal's coach attended by all his servants and following. But suddenly, while we marched, there happened something which put all thoughts of the Cardinal and his devoted friend, the Princess Ana, out of our heads—something terrible—awful—to behold.

A house, an inn, on fire, blazing fiercely, as we could see, even as we all struck spurs into our horses and

galloped swiftly towards it—a house from the upper windows of which we could observe the faces of people looking. The *upper* windows, because all the lower part was in flames, and because they who were inside had all retreated up and up and up. Only, what could that avail them! Soon the house, the top floor—there were two above the ground—must fall in and—then! Yes—then!

We reached that burning *auberge*—’twas terrible, ghastly, to see the flames bursting forth from it in the broad daylight and looking white in the glare of the warm southern sun, although ’twas winter—reached it, wondering what we could do to save those who were perishing; to save the screaming mother with her babe clasped to her breast, the white-faced man who called on God through the open window he was at to spare him and his, or, if not him, then his wife and child.

What could we do—what? Bid them leap down to us, fling themselves upon us—yes, at least we might do that. One thing at least we could undoubtedly do—bid them throw down the babe into our arms. And this was done. The troopers sat close upon their horses, their arms extended; a moment later the little thing was safe in the great strong arms of the men, and being caressed and folded to the breast of our great brawny sergeant. Then, even as I witnessed this, even, too, as I (dismounted now) hurried round with some *mousquetaires* to discover if, in God’s mercy, there was any ladder behind in the outhouse or garden whereby the upper part might be reached, I myself almost screamed with horror; for, at that moment, on to the roof there had sprung a woman shrieking; a woman down whose back fell coils of long black hair; a woman, handsome, beautiful, even in her agony and fear; a woman who was the girl called Damaris.

“Damaris!” I called out, “Damaris!” for by that

name I had come to think of her, had known her for a short hour or so, "Damaris! be calm, do nothing rash. We will save you; the walls will not fall in yet. Be cool." But in answer to my words she could do nothing but wring her hands and shriek.

"I cannot die like this—not like this. Oh, Blue Eyes, save me! Save me! Save me! You called me your sweetheart. Save me!"

Then, at that moment, I heard a calm, icy voice beside me say—it was the voice of Marcieu—"Does your highness intend to restore the late King of Spain's will? Answer that, or I swear, since I command here, that you shall not be saved."

In a moment I had sprung at him, would have pulled him off his horse, have struck him in the mouth, have killed him for his brutality, but that Camier and two of the troopers held me back, and, even as they did so, I heard the girl's voice ring out, "Yes! yes! yes! 'tis here;" while, as she spoke, she put her hand in the bag by her side, drew out the red ball, and flung it down from the roof to where we all were.

But by now, Heaven in its mercy be praised! some of the others had found a ladder and brought it round, and were placing it against the walls. Only, it was too short! God help her! it but reached to the sill of the top-floor window.

And now I was distraught, was mad with grief and horror, when again that cold-blooded creature, Marcieu, spoke, saying, "What matter? can she not descend from the roof to the room that window is in?" and at the same moment Pontgibaud called out to her to do that very thing, which she, at once understanding, prepared to accomplish.

Meanwhile, some of the men, who were all now dismounted, had sprung to the ladder, eager to save, first the girl, I think, then next the woman of the house, and then

the man. But I ordered them back. I alone would save her, I said, I alone. Princess or stroller, noble or crafty adherent of a wronged monarchy, whichever she might be, I had taken a liking to this girl; she had called on me to save her, and I would do it. Wherefore, up the ladder I went as quickly as the weight of my great riding boots and trappings would permit me, while all the time the flames were shooting out from the lower windows—up, until I stood at the top one and received her in my arms, telling the woman and the man they should be saved immediately, which they were, the troopers fetching down the woman, and the man following directly after by himself; yet none too soon either, for, even as he came down, the flames had set the lower part of the ladder afire, so that it fell down and he got singed as he came to earth. But, nevertheless, all were now saved; and Damaris stood trembling by my side, and pouring out her thanks to, and blessings upon, me.

“I—I—did not mean what I said,” stammered Marcieu. “I meant you should be saved. But I meant also to have that will, and I have got it.” While, as his eye roved around us, he saw the disgust written upon all our faces, on the faces alike of officers and men.

“You have got it,” she answered contemptuously. “You have! Much good may it do you, animal!” and again I saw the beautiful white teeth gleam between her lips.

“But why here, Dama-Señorita?” I whispered; “why here? You came the wrong way if you wished to escape with the precious document.”

She gave me somewhat of a nervous, tremulous smile, and was about to answer me, and give me some explanation, when, lo! there came an interruption to all our talk. The long-expected Cardinal was approaching. Alberoni had crossed the Pyrenees.

But in what a way to come! We could scarcely



The Rescue.

believe our eyes. There was no coach, nor heavily-laden mules to bear him and his followers and belongings. He was on foot ; so, too, were his attendants. He, a cardinal ; the arbiter of Spain, while ostensibly only the political agent of the Duke of Parma ; a prince of the Church ; a man who had intrigued for, and almost secured, one of the greatest prizes of that Church, the primacy of the land from which he had now been expelled—on foot ! so that, if he had not had on his head his cardinal's hat—which he doubtless wore in his arrogance—none would have deemed him the great man he was, even in his downfall. All doffed their own hats as he came near us, Marcieu doing so as respectfully as any, while, as we removed ours, I saw him steal a glance at her whom we had known as Damaris. Such a glance, such a sly, cunning one ! Then, as she sprang forward to take his hand, meaning, I think, to kiss it, he prevented her from doing so by, instead, raising that hand above her head and muttering, as I supposed, a blessing. But now, even as he looked somewhat wonderingly at the still burning house, he turned to Marcieu and said—

“You are the man, I imagine, and those your troopers, whom Philippe the Regent has sent to intercept me. Ha ! you are surprised that I know this,” he went on, seeing the start that Marcieu gave when he heard those words. “Are you not ? If you should ever know Alberoni better, you will learn that he is a match for most court spies in Europe.”

Now the chevalier did seem so utterly taken aback at this (which caused Pontgibaud to give me a quaint look of satisfaction out of the tail of his eye—for every one of us hated that man mortally) that he could do nothing but bow, uttering no sound. Whereon the Cardinal proceeded :

“Well ! What do you expect to do with me ? Your comrades of Spain—the knaves and brigands whom the

King sent after me from Madrid—have pillaged me of all. Some day I will pay his Majesty for the outrage—let him beware lest I place Austria back upon his throne. 'Twas a beggarly trick!—to take my carriages and mules, my jewels and wealth—even the will of the late King, which was most lawfully and rightfully in my possession.”

“What!” broke from several of our lips, “what!” while from Marcieu’s white and trembling ones came the words, “The late King’s will! It is impossible. This girl—this lady—has handed it to me!”

For a moment the Cardinal’s sly glance rested on the Princess, then on Marcieu, and then—then—i.e. actually laughed, not loud, but long.

“Monsieur,” he said at last, “you are a poor spy—easily to be tricked. You will never make a living at the calling. The will that lady gave you was a duplicate, a copy. It was meant that you should have *that*—that it should fall into your stupid hands. And, had I not been robbed on the other side of the mountains, you would not have seen me here.”

“It is so,” the Princess said, striding up to where the chevalier stood; “it is so. You spy! you spy! you *mouchard*! if that worthless piece of paper in the red ball had been the real will, I would have perished in the burning house before letting it fall into your hands.” Then, sinking her voice still lower, though not so low but that some of us could hear what she said, she went on: “Have a care for your future. The followers of Austria have still some power left, even at the Court of France. Your threat to let me burn on the roof was *not* unmeant. It will be remembered.”

And now there is no more to tell, except that the Princess knew that Marcieu meant to take the real will from the Cardinal if he met him, and so it had been arranged that, through her, the paper which he would suppose was that real will was to fall into his hands, and

Alberoni would thus have been enabled to retain the original and escape with it out of France. She had preceded us to the foot of the mountains from Toulouse, meaning, when we came up, to let Marcieu obtain the red ball and thus be hoodwinked; and the accident of the fire at the inn only anticipated what she intended



“A friendship that eventually ripened—”

doing. The unexpected following of, and attack upon, the Cardinal, ere he quitted Spain and descended the Pyrenees into France, had, however, spoilt all their plans.

Here I should attempt that which most writers of narratives are in the habit of performing, namely, conclude by telling you what was the end of Ana de Carba-

jal's adventure, of how she won and broke hearts and eventually made a brilliant match. That is what Monsieur Marivaux or the fair Scuderi would have done, as well as some of the writers in my own native land. But I refrain, because this strange meeting between me and the beautiful and adventurous Spanish lady was but the commencement of a long friendship that eventually ripened—However, no matter. Some day, when my hand is not weary and the spirit is upon me, I intend to write down more of the history of the high-bred young aristocrat who first appeared before me as a wandering stroller, and passed for “a girl called Damaris.”

A NEW ENGLAND RAID

By E. F. POLLARD

Author of "Roger the Ranger," &c.

THE first glow of morning was creeping over the land as an Indian emerged from the forest. He ran swiftly, with that easy swing of the body and lightness of foot for which his race is remarkable. Leaping a wooden fence, he paused and stood, for the space of a second, looking up at a large square house, plain and unornamented, such as the early settlers in New England were wont to build for themselves.

The inhabitants were still buried in sleep, and the Indian's approach had been so noiseless that it had failed even to rouse the watch-dog. Taking a handful of gravel he threw it with unerring aim at a window on the second floor. An instant afterwards the lattice was opened and a young man's head thrust out, a voice asking, "What's up, Will?"

The Indian made a peculiar sign, which might easily be interpreted into "Come down."

"All right," said Josiah Blackstone, and disappeared.

Then Josh, as he was familiarly called, came down the broad staircase, removed noiselessly the bars and bolts which secured the front door, and slipped out into the porch, against the great oak post of which the Indian was leaning. A huge mastiff came bounding round from the back of the house with an ominous growl, but he evidently recognised the Indian, for he ran up to him wagging his tail and fawning upon him with unmistakable signs of pleasure.

"What has brought you, Will? I thought you were off fishing in the Great Lakes," said Josiah. Then eyeing him carefully, he added, "You look as if you had travelled far and fast."

"So Will has," answered the Indian in English. "Will Narburton ran a day and a night to bring news, bad news."

"Sorry to hear it," said Josh. "Is Philip up to mischief?"

The Indian made a sign of assent.

"Tobias, the Sachem of Nipmuck's son, and two others, have slain John Susaman, the missionary," he said.

"Killed gentle John!" exclaimed Josh—"are you sure, Will?"

"My own eyes saw it," said the Indian. "They waylaid John, knocked him on the head, and thrust him dead into the pond near Middleborough. I was on the other side and watched the Sachem's son, Tobias, and the two others, do the deed. Knowing they do not love the men of my tribe, I was afraid, and hid myself in the long rushes. They struck John from behind, so that he did not see. He never moved again. Then they put him into the hole. I waited till the wicked ones were on their way back to tell the Sachem the evil work was finished, then I ran all day and all night to warn you. King Philip is angry; he has sworn he will drive the white man out of the hunting grounds."

"I know it," answered Josh. "I fear this means war."

"As the arrow flies through the air swiftly and slays, so the Indian will drop down into your midst, and the scalps of the white men will be his reward," said Will Narburton.

"Hush!" said Josh, "I hear my mother's step on the stairs; she must not be alarmed."

The Indian raised his head and whispered : " No tell missis, she woman, she frightened ; tell master."

He had hardly given utterance to this sentiment when a tall comely woman, in the close cap, plain black gown, and white bibbed apron of the New England matron,



" I was afraid, and hid myself in the long rushes."

came out into the porch, and seeing Will Narburton, smiled a welcome.

" I wondered who you might be entertaining at this early hour, Josh," she said, laying her hand on her son's arm. " Has Will come to tempt you to go fishing or hunting with him ?"

" No, mother ; but he has brought some important

news, which I must communicate to my father. Will you see that Narburton has food and drink, for he has travelled a long distance to do us service?"

"Gladly," answered Mrs. Blackstone. "Go ye round to the kitchen, Will; if Mary be not there, I will open to you and see to your needs myself. Your father will be down directly, Josh," she added, addressing her son, and then she hastened away intent upon her household duties.

The Blackstones had been amongst the first settlers on the borders of Connecticut. By the banks of the river Seek-ouk they had built a house and named it "Study Hill"; they had also planted orchards, and the fruitful land rewarded their labour with rich harvests. It was but a few weeks since the grandsire had been laid to rest among his apple-trees, and his son, Nathan Blackstone, now reigned in his stead. Josh was the only surviving son of this third generation; he dwelt at home, and was his father's right hand. Nathan was an elder of the Church and a civil magistrate, revered by the settlers, and scarcely less so by the Indians, to whom he had always been well inclined; declaring the safety of the English lay in a just recognition of the natural rights of the natives, and attaching much blame to those who would have had the red man rooted out as being of the accursed race of Ham. Nevertheless he deemed it necessary they should be watched, feeling by no means assured that they were other than the children of the devil, more especially as the effects of Christianity and civilisation on the Indian were far from conducive to virtue.

The Puritan fathers were remarkably unsuccessful in their efforts to propagate Christianity, may-be because of the harshness of their doctrines; but it is a fact that after fifty years' labour amongst the thousands of natives in New England, less than 1500 Indians were converted. These were known as the "Praying Indians," and their position was far from enviable, they being despised by their own

people, and not wholly trusted by the colonists themselves. Will Narburton and the murdered John Susaman belonged to this class—indeed the latter was employed as a missionary, and was much esteemed by the Brethren ; his death, therefore, was an event not likely to be passed over.

Hearing his father's step coming down the stairs, Josh turned and greeted him, and the two went out together, pacing side by side along the garden-walk in front of the house, as was their wont when they had any matter under discussion. They resembled each other greatly, being of the same height, broad-shouldered, and powerful of limb ; their features were strongly marked ; their complexions ruddy, deep-set grey eyes and dark-brown hair ; Nathan's, however, was cropped short, after the fashion of the Puritan fathers, but Josh wore his somewhat longer ; also Nathan was clean shaven, but his son had both beard and moustache.

They were fine, well-built men, with honest, open countenances, God-fearing and true-hearted, ready to do their duty alike to God and man.

As Nathan listened to the news Will Narburton had brought, his face grew serious.

"I foresee trouble," he said. "John Susaman has warned the men of Boston for some time past that the Sachem of the Wampanoags was disaffected, and they paid no heed to his words ; I fear it is now too late. We have been at peace with the Indians for many years ; but if war were to break out now, it would be far worse than in the early days, because the red man has possessed himself of firearms in addition to his own weapons. It is a serious matter."

"It were well that the news should be carried to Boston without delay," said Josh. "If you be willing, father, I will ride in at once and take Will with me, he being an eye-witness to the deed."

"Certainly, I think it desirable," said Nathan ; "but

you must go well armed, for there is no saying what the Indians may be up to, now they are roused. They are as likely as not to waylay you, if they suspect you to be carrying news of their misdoing to Boston."

And so accompanied by Will Narburton, both mounted on good horses, Josh left his peaceful home, never doubting but that he should return thither within a few days and find it even as he had left it. He wore the New England Ranger's dress, namely, a deep ash-coloured hunting shirt, leggings and moccasins; he was armed with a rifle-barrelled gun, a small axe, and a long knife, which served for all purposes in the woods; a broad-brimmed hat completed this somewhat sombre attire, which nevertheless became him well, at least so his mother and Rena, his young sister, thought as they watched him ride away. Josh and his companion reached the city without hindrance, and on Will's testimony the three murderers were arrested within a week. They were tried before a mixed jury of Indians and English, and Tobias was hanged. Now the Sachem of Mipmuck and King Philip, or Metacomet, as the men of his own tribe called him, Sachem of the Wampanoags, were allies, and they were therefore united in their anger against the settlers. So it came to pass on a certain day King Philip summoned to his camp at Mount Hope the chiefs, not only of his own tribe, but of all those with whom he was on friendly terms, to consult whether it was to be war or peace with the white man.

The Sachem sat in his chair of state (a common wooden chair with a straw bottom), surrounded by his counsellors and captains in full battle array, with their war paints and feathers, their tomahawks in their belts, their bows and arrows slung across their naked shoulders. Standing before the King was a woman. The skins of beasts of prey hung from her shoulders and were girded round her waist, strings of beads encircled her neck, her

long black hair hung loosely to her waist, and on her head was a high crown made of the plumage of all manner of birds. Her attitude was majestic, as with outstretched arm, tears streaming from her eyes, she addressed the assembly.

“O brother of my murdered husband! I bring you three hundred warriors, to war against the white man, who slew my beloved, not on the battlefield as a warrior should depart, but by treachery. Long years have I waited to avenge him, but now surely the time has come. The white men are driving us from our hunting-fields; they destroy our forests, so that the wild beasts forsake their lairs, and soon we shall lack food for our children. Let us unite and drive them across the sea from whence they came! I am but a woman, made to carry burdens and to bear sons; but my husband has been slain, and the son I bore him died on my bosom. Shall I not avenge them? Is the time not come?”

Thus spake the squaw, Sachem Weetamoo, the widow of King Philip's brother Alexander, who, being accused of plotting against the English, had been taken as a prisoner to Plymouth, where he died, his people said of poison, but in truth of a fever brought on by anger and vexation at his position.

This had happened upwards of fifteen years ago, but the widowed squaw, Sachem, had never ceased wailing, and importuning Philip to avenge her husband, and now, hearing that he had been called to account for the murder of the missionary, she hastened down with three hundred warriors from the fort on the Pocasset shore, where she dwelt, and urged him, with all the passion of a woman's deadly hatred, to take up arms and drive the white man out of the land.

She had chosen her time well, for but a few days previously Philip had been summoned to Boston and compelled to promise that he would deliver up all English

arms in the possession of his tribe, and both he and his chief men were angered, so that Weetamoo's arguments, and the presence of the armed warriors she had brought with her, fired them, and they shouted that she spoke with wisdom.

Philip assented, and straightway swift messengers were sent forth with the wampum belt from village to village, from tribe to tribe, and Weetamoo went to her wigwam triumphant. Before the people of New England had time to realise the fact, the flames of burning homesteads, the flight of terrified women and children, spread terror far and wide.

But even then the elders, the men of Boston and New Plymouth, made an effort to maintain peace, promising to all Indians who would lay down their arms, life and liberty. Further, they decided to send a deputation to Philip with offers of conciliation.

It was a dangerous mission, and there was some hesitation in asking any one to undertake it; but the matter was settled when Josh Blackstone came forward and proposed being the bearer thereof. He and his father were on friendly terms with the Indians, especially with Philip; Josh had often been a guest at Mount Hope for weeks together during the hunting season. He declared he had no fear; he would go alone to Philip. His assurance had the effect of encouraging others, and six young men offered to accompany him.

"That is too many; it looks distrustful," he said, and chose three, with whom he set forth at once, sending Will back to Study Hill, with a letter to his father, telling the errand upon which he was bound, and assuring him he anticipated no danger. Nathan was not quite so well satisfied, but he refrained from saying aught which might alarm his wife and Rena.

"The lad is doing his duty; it will be well whatever betides him," he said, and he went about his farm cheer-

fully, encouraging his neighbours, and taking all due precaution against the enemy.

The country over which Josh and his companions had to travel to Mount Hope was so well known to the former that he was able to lessen the distance by short cuts across country. For the most part it was thickly wooded, but sometimes they had to skirt vast tracts of swampy land overgrown with reeds, bulrushes, and long grass. Josh knew that such places were usually resorted to by Indians when they wished to waylay their enemies ; he therefore kept a sharp look-out.

Within a few miles of the Mount they came upon a great lake. On one side was an almost impenetrable forest, and on the other an immense swamp.

Unfortunately it was evening, and as there was no path they dismounted and were leading their horses, when suddenly a wild unearthly yell rose on the still air, and a horde of Indians came scrambling up the banks of the lake ; in a second they were upon the English.

"Run!" shouted Josh to his companions, "it's your only chance." He, slipping his horse's bridle, placed himself with his back to a tree and fired into the enemy, to keep them, if only for a few minutes, at bay. He knew from the first that resistance was hopeless. The savages literally swarmed upon them. He saw two of his three men fall, their skulls cloven ; then an Indian, taller than his fellows, with bigger feathers on his head, felled him to the ground. He did not even then lose consciousness, expecting to feel the sharp scalp-knife do its cruel work, when, to his surprise, he was dragged by the hair of his head out of the fray, hoisted on to one of the horses, an Indian sprang up behind him uttering a loud whoop, and they were scouring through the forest out into the open plain. The natural instinct of self-preservation made Josh cling desperately to the horse's mane, as the animal, terrified by the Indian's savage yells, leaped through the thick under-

growth, waded across streams, then bounding over a high barrier, was drawn suddenly up, almost on to his haunches, and so stopped short. Josh would have been done to death, scalped then and there, but for his captor, to whom, according to the laws of war, he belonged solely. The natives leaped and yelled around them as the chief flung himself to the ground, spoke a few words to them which elicited shouts of delight, and strode away. Amidst loud jeering and yells, to say nothing of two or three heavy blows, Josh was overthrown, his limbs bound with strong reeds, and in this helpless condition he was dragged some distance and thrust into an empty hut. He lay for a time insensible from the ill-usage and blows he had received ; but gradually he recovered consciousness, and the horror of his position rushed upon him. He knew that, as a prisoner, he would be subject to frightful tortures before he was even allowed to die—surely it was a refinement of cruelty to have spared his life !

As the cold dews of night crept on, strong man as he was, he shivered, and the smarting of his wounds, the soreness of his bruises, became almost intolerable. It was many hours also since he had tasted food. That did not trouble him ; as a hunter he was accustomed to long fasts. But his thirst was growing more and more intense, his lips were parched, his tongue clave to the roof of his mouth. To add to his misery, as he lay on the damp ground, he could see the fires of his enemies, and hear their unearthly deafening yells, as they feasted and made merry. Once, nay, twice, he tried to break his bonds ; but it was useless, they were too tightly woven. Probably from sheer exhaustion he dropped asleep. Surely he was dreaming, for he felt a hand laid upon him and heard a voice whisper, "Fear not, but drink ;" then his head was raised, a gourd put to his lips ; he drank eagerly a long draught of pure water, and sank back refreshed.

"Who are you ?" he asked.

"I am Thusick, King Philip's daughter," answered the same voice. "I do not hate the white men; they are wise and brave, have taught us many things; therefore I have brought you water, knowing that the fever must be on you."

Thusick's voice was gentle, and the hand she laid on his head was wondrous cool and soft, so that a wave of renewed hope and vigour came to Josh, and he said eagerly—

"It is good of you to bring me water, but it were kinder still to unloose my bonds and help me to escape."

It was night, so he could not see how pitiful the dark eyes grew.

"It were useless," she said, "the camp is too well guarded; you could not escape. My father has saved your life; he does not will that you should die, because you were his friend. If you have courage you may live. To-morrow at dawn your bonds will be cut, and you will be brought forth to run the gantlet. If you are swift of foot, and are not beaten down, but reach the King and touch his knees, they will spare you. Three separate times must you run that race, and afterwards you will be adopted by our people, in place of the Black Hawk, whom your men slew to-day; you will take a wife from amongst us, and it will be well with you."

Josh did not, even under present circumstances, see it in the same light as Thusick, but he was young, and the mere chance of life was welcome. He was in no mood to trouble about the future; the present hour was too fraught with anxiety. He knew from hearsay what was meant by the cruel ordeal of the gantlet, and how not one man in ten came forth from it alive, and overpowered as he was with a sense of physical weakness, his heart sank within him.

"This girl has brought me water; surely she could also bring me food to strengthen me," he thought, so he spoke out.

"I shall never run to-morrow, for I have had no food, and I shall faint."

"I have brought food," she answered, "also where-with to dress your wounds and make you strong."

Cautiously she raised a corner of the matting which hung over the entrance of the hut, so that a glimmer of light from the now dying fires crept in. Then she fed him with meat, and afterwards she bathed his head, and stripping his shirt as best she could, washed his wounds. When all was finished, she put a nut into his mouth, saying—

"It is bitter to the taste, but it is sweet, for it will give you strength; let it lie all night in your mouth, and to-morrow you will run swiftly. Our warriors eat thereof when they go on the war trail, and they are strong. Now, farewell!"

Through the dimness he saw the tall, lithe figure glide out and disappear into the night. Then a sort of lethargy stole over him; his eyelids closed and he slept.

A prolonged whoop, and Josh awoke with a start. The sun was creeping into the hut, and he knew it was morning. If he had needed any reminder of what lay before him, it was there unmistakably, in the presence of half-a-dozen red men, who stood talking and gesticulating, whilst one of their number cut the thongs which bound him, and by a sign bade him rise. He obeyed, and instantly heavy hands were laid upon him, his clothes were torn off his back, and he stood stark naked in their midst.

A momentary feeling of the utter hopelessness of his position swept over him; as he looked at the savages, armed with tomahawks and scalping-knives, he felt that his chances of life were indeed small.

"Have good courage, be swift of foot, and it will be well with you;" Thusick, the King's daughter, had so spoken, and he believed her; moreover, he was conscious that the fatigue of the previous day had passed away. His

limbs felt light and strong. He tossed back his head defiantly, and a flash of determination lighted up his blue eyes.

"I'll not give in without a good try," he thought, remembering those at home—"father, mother, Rena!"

A push from behind sent him out of the hut into the broad sunlight of a July morning. Amidst hundreds of dark skins he stood forth in his naked whiteness alone, a target for all eyes. Shrieks, yells, whoops, greeted his appearance from the vast crowd gathered to witness the torture of the white man.

He might well be excused if the horror of the situation caused his cheek to pale and a tremor to run through his whole body.

"Drink, drink quickly!" and a gourd was thrust into his hand. Instinctively, without hesitation, he put it to his lips and drained the contents, then threw it on the ground. The action was so rapid that it passed unperceived, but the effect of the liquor was almost magical. It was like an electric shock coursing through his veins. The mist which had obscured his vision was cleared away; he saw the road stretched out before him along which he was to run, savages on either side waving thongs and sticks wherewith to scourge him, and at the farther end, surrounded by his chiefs, King Philip, with feathered crests and beaded trappings. The rising of the King to his feet was the token that the ordeal was to begin.

Strange as it may seem, all sense of fear had left Josh; he was quite calm now. Setting his teeth tight, he gathered himself together, and with one foot forward, awaited the signal.

"Others have done it, so, please God, will I," he murmured. A clash! a wild shout rang out through the summer air, and he was driven forward. Over the ground he flew, with the steady pluck of a practised runner, his nerves wrought to their highest tension, heed-

less alike of the blows which hailed upon him, of the thongs which tore his flesh. Faster, ever faster, on he went, blood pouring down his body until the white skin was red and mauled. As he neared the goal the yells of rage grew louder, the onslaught fiercer, but he never wavered, though his breath came short and hard ; verily, they were beating it out of him.

A blow struck him high up on the neck ; he staggered, but the yells of delight which greeted this sign of failing strength so maddened him, that with a supreme effort he leaped forward, threw out his arms, and caught at something which stayed his course. A rushing sound as of the incoming tide surged round him, died out, and stillness as of death crept over him as he slipped unconscious to the ground.

That last spurt saved Josh Blackstone's life. His outstretched arms had clasped neither pillar nor post, but King Philip's knees ! and straightway Thusick sprang forward and pleaded that the white man should be delivered to her, that she might heal him, and so he would once again afford them sport. Her words were greeted with shouts of approval, for he had done bravely. Usually victims failed to traverse half the appointed space before they succumbed, but he had fallen at the goal and was still living ! So Thusick's prayer was granted, and he was delivered into her hands.

Hardly had the judgment been passed when a messenger arrived bringing news to Philip that the Boston men were sending troops against him, and that it were well for him to hasten and destroy the nearest villages and homesteads before they came up to give him battle. Philip needed no urging ; in an incredibly short time the camp of Mount Hope was left to the old men, women, and children, and before the mid-day sun was high in the heavens the last plumed savage had disappeared. Strange stillness reigned where, but a short time before,

shouts and yells had filled the air. On the outskirts of the camp, close to the wooden palisades, was a solitary wigwam; thither, by Thusick's orders, the unconscious Josh was carried, and laid on a bed of fresh rushes.

Indian women had much knowledge of medicinal herbs and plants, and Thusick was skilled even more than others. Quickly she washed his wounds in fresh water, covered his body with unguents and newly-plucked leaves, so that when he recovered consciousness and opened his eyes it was to a sense of comparative comfort. He tried to raise himself, but Thusick bade him lie still.

"Philip is gone," she said; "have no fear, the chiefs are with him."

"Gone to kill my people, and I am helpless! Let me go too," he said, and again he strove to rise; but the movement caused his wounds to break out bleeding afresh, and in utter despair he threw himself back on his couch of reeds, and broke out into bitter weeping, the outburst of mental agony long restrained, and great physical pain.

"Father! mother! Rena! they will be done to death!" he cried, "and I cannot strike a blow to save them."

"The days are long," said the Indian girl; "by night the great pain will have passed away, and, brave man, you can go. If you have courage and can walk till dawn, you will come to an Indian village, friends of your people; they will save you."

"Is it true? Shall I be able to do this?" he asked wearily, feeling so helpless.

"Yes, if you are strong," said the girl. "Now sleep, for sleep gives strength." She handed him a gourd, saying, "Drink!"

Suddenly a great passion took possession of Josh, a feeling of deadly hatred until now unknown to him. All the suffering, all the indignity he had undergone, seemed to madden him.

"Why do you try to save my life," he said, "when I

hate your people, and if I live will slay them? I will never rest day or night till I have overcome your father and exterminated his warriors. I will not take life at your hands and give you death."

Thusick shook her head; her unreasoning mind could not follow him. She was but a savage, guided by instinct. She gave no name to her actions. Mercy and love were unknown in her vocabulary. Out of her own gentle nature she did the deeds of mercy.

"Drink," she repeated in answer to his angry words, and sullenly he obeyed. "Now sleep, Thusick will watch," and sitting down beside him with a bunch of gorgeous feathers in her hand, she waved them over him to keep the noxious flies and insects from settling on his wounds.

When again he awoke it was night, and Thusick was standing beside him.

"It is time you went forth," she said, holding out her hand to help him to rise. He was astonished to feel no pain, and that his limbs obeyed his will so that he was able to stand erect.

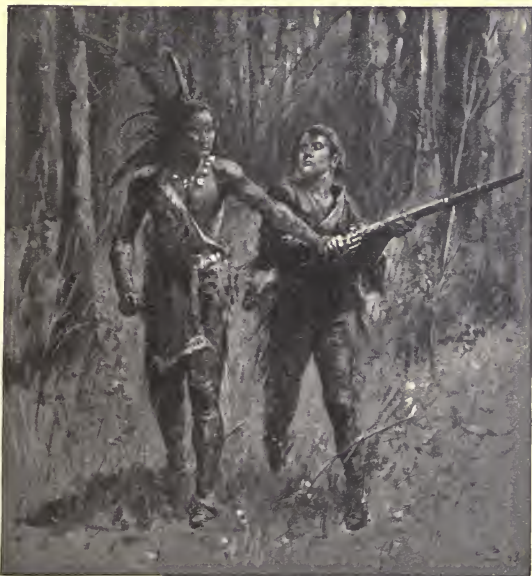
"Clothe yourself and come forth," said Thusick; "fear not, the old men and women are sleeping; they will not hear," and she went to the door of the wigwam.

By the light of an oil lamp Josh saw a portion of his own clothing lying in a heap within his reach. He noticed also that a gun and a hatchet were placed beside them, food and drink were on the ground. He did not know that throughout that long day, whilst he slept, the Indian woman had so tended him, that, not only the pain of his wounds had ceased, but they were fast healing. A few seconds later, he stood at the entrance of the wigwam by Thusick's side. She raised her hand, pointed to the west, and speaking in a low voice, said—

"The summer nights are short; before dawn you will reach the Mohawks' village."

Josh looked down at her, and even in that supreme moment, when his soul was still bitter within him, he remembered what he owed her, and speaking gently, said—

“Your men I will not spare, I will slay them; but for



“Quiet! Josiah Blackstone.”

your sake, Thusick, I will protect every woman of your race, so help me God!”

“It is well,” she answered; “now depart.”

He obeyed, and Thusick watched him until he had disappeared down the side of the Mount; then she re-

turned to her own wigwam, with a dull pain at her heart.

As Josh reached the bottom of the hill, he heard a horse neigh, and at the same moment a hand was laid upon his shoulder.

"Caught again," he thought, instinctively making a supreme effort to escape from his invisible foe, but the grip was of iron, and he knew at once who it was that held him down, when a voice said, speaking in English, but with a soft Indian intonation —

"Quiet! Josiah Blackstone, do you think, if I had not willed it, you would be alive now? Twice I have saved your life, and now a third time, because we have been friends and you have smoked the calumet in my wigwam; but from henceforth we are as strangers. I know you no more." As he spoke he loosed his hold, and Josh, turning, saw the gigantic form of the Sachem King Philip, with the crested plume on his head, looming forth, a huge shadow in the darkness.

"You have saved me from death, but you have subjected me to indignities worse than death," said Josh; "nevertheless I thank you, for surely you meant well."

"If I had not carried you off they would have killed you as they did your companions," said Philip, "and a prisoner's fate is torture and death; only to the few is it granted to run the gantlet and to live. I gave you a chance, you have won, and I let you go forth free. Would your people have done as much for me? Have you not driven us out of our own lands, where our fathers hunted? When the white men first trod our shores we bade them welcome, offering, in exchange for a few cart-loads of cloths, trinkets, and guns, to share the land with them and dwell together in peace. We were foolish, not knowing that where the white man sets his foot he must be sole master. You clear our forests, you build houses, you make towns, and we are driven farther and farther

into wilds, and our familiar hunting-grounds know us no more. We have suffered much, and so we have risen, and will burn your houses and your towns, and send you back from whence you came. I will show your people that the red man can fight for his own and conquer."

"Fight you may, but you will not conquer," said Josh. "I do not say you are wrong, Philip; if I were in your stead I should doubtless feel as you do. But the time is past for you to drive us out; we have made this land our own, rightly or wrongly, and we shall keep it. Be wise while it is yet time; do not light a torch which will set your forests on fire and destroy your people."

"It is too late; I am bound," answered the King. "Farewell, Josiah Blackstone. There is your horse, ride quickly south, and warn your people; avoid the great forest." And having so spoken, the huge form leaped up the Mount, bounding from hillock to hillock, and so disappeared.

"A child of nature, a man with a big heart, worthy to be a king. I am sorry to lose him for my friend!" sighed Josh. Then mounting his horse, he rode in the direction Philip had indicated. As Thusick had said, the summer nights were short, but the day had not yet dawned when Josh perceived flames and smoke rising in various directions. The settlements and homesteads were far apart, there were few roads, and communication was difficult. Checking his horse, Josh looked around, and was startled by the lurid redness of the sky, and by every other sign of a vast conflagration near at hand.

"I must be approaching Brookfield," he thought; "I have ridden farther west than I imagined."

Suddenly the flames shot up, shrieks of agony filled the air, and by the fierce light he saw a crowd of men, women, and children coming in the direction of the forest. He remembered Philip's words, and knew the danger lay there. Riding quickly forward he placed himself in front

of them, shouting, "Back! back! for God's sake, keep out of the forest!"

At the same moment a gust of wind dispersed the smoke, and showed him a few hundred yards distant a house, which, owing to its isolated position, away from the burning town, was untouched by fire.

"Follow me," he cried, and dashed towards it.

His sudden appearance, his assurance of voice and manner, had the desired effect; the fugitives crowded round him, some even clinging to his stirrups. All vaguely in their terror wondered from whence he had sprung. "Surely he must have been sent to save them from the heathen." So he drew them on until they reached the house, entered the courtyard, and some one closed the gates, thus ensuring safety for a short time at least.

The day was just dawning, but it was hardly perceptible because of the fierce light from the burning town, which reddened land and sky with a deeper glow than the rising sun. Coming ever nearer and nearer they heard the yells of the savages, and the children clung in terror to their mothers, who, in their anguish, called upon the men to save them.

"Quick to the house and barricade doors and windows," said Josh.

"You are driving us into a trap; we shall be either murdered or burnt alive," cried a farmer.

"You will at least have a chance of defending yourselves," answered Josh; "in the forest you would have been slaughtered. I do not say we shall escape now, but at least we can fight and die like men."

"He's right," said James Carter, the owner of the house. "My father built the homestead; it is strong and well seasoned. Comrades, if we must die, we will sell our lives dearly. Quick, do as the young man bids you," and throwing open the doors, he hurried the women and children within.

Josh still sat on his horse looking round, considering rapidly the possibility of holding the place against such terrible odds. The physical and mental sufferings through which he had passed had told upon him in no ordinary degree: his face was drawn and perfectly colourless, his eyes were sunk deep in his head, and his lips cracked with a consuming fever; from a bright, happy-looking man, he had grown stern and forbidding. Truly the iron had entered into his soul.

"I must find some place for my horse; I cannot let him loose, we may need him. Do you know where I can put him with any degree of safety?" he asked a young man of about his own age who for the last few minutes had been watching him attentively.

"If you will dismount, I will stow him away," was the quiet answer.

Josh made an effort to throw himself off, but as he reached the ground he staggered and almost fell.

"Are you hurt?" asked Stephen Carter, eyeing him curiously.

"Only stiff," answered Josh with an effort, pulling himself together. "We must hurry up. Do you hear? The Indians are close at hand."

"This way then," said the young man, preceding him to an inner courtyard, where there was a shed. "He will be all right here."

"Are you acquainted with this house?" asked Josh.

"I ought to be; it is my father's," was the short answer. "I am Stephen Carter."

"That is well; then you have a right to command. Will you see that the doors and windows are closed? All the men who have arms must guard the entrances. Those who have none, with the women, must draw water from the wells and fill every bucket and utensil, for the Indians will try to burn us out; it is their way."

He had hardly finished speaking, when the frantic

yells of the savages, the shots pouring in on all sides, told only too plainly that the siege had already begun.

"Young man, whoever you may be," said the farmer, who had at first protested, "you brought us into this trap, and you must get us out."

"I'll do the best I can for you," answered Josh, and he went off one way, Stephen Carter another, to organise the defence.

They were indeed in a desperate strait; to enter the house and massacre every white man, woman, and child, was the determined object of the besiegers, and they left no device untried to accomplish this.

"The devils! I told you they'd fire us," said Josh to Stephen, as looking through a chink he saw the Indians piling wood and other combustible materials up against the walls of the house.

"Quick, make a chain and give them a shower-bath," he shouted.

He was obeyed with right good-will, and the flames were extinguished.

Then firebrands, fastened on long poles, were hoisted against the cornices and projections, in the hope of setting them on fire. Then arrows wound round with burning rags filled with sulphur were shot down on to the roof; whilst the savages swarmed on to the window-sills and balconies, trying to find some unguarded place; but they were thrust back, more often shot down, and falling on those below, created great confusion.

The first terror over, the besieged entered heart and soul into the spirit of the defence, and at every turn, by every device and cunning, baffled the Indians. Josh was indefatigable, Stephen following close on his heels, for his daring, unceasing energy excited the latter's admiration and fascinated him. He was seen to tear the firebrands from the poles and dash them amongst the enemy, then mounting on the roof he hurled the sulphured arrows back to

whence they came ; and his example being quickly followed by others, no wonder if the savages lost heart, so that when at last Josh and Stephen, with a dozen other men, dashed into their midst, an almost hand-to-hand fight ensued, and they gradually gave way and fled to the shelter of the forest, leaving many dead and wounded behind them on the ground. Then the besieged had a short respite, and were able to take counsel together. Men pressed forward to shake Josh by the hand, forgetting he was a stranger. His white set face now begrimed with smoke was ghastly to behold. Stephen brought him food. "You are doing the work of half-a-dozen men," he said ; "your strength will fail you if you do not eat." Silently Josh acquiesced, thanking him.

A man came up to him.

"Have you heard that Colonel Willard of Boston has been despatched westward ?" he asked.

"No ; how should I ?" said Josh. "If that is a fact, and our plight were made known to him, he might come to our rescue."

"It *is* a fact ; he was sent to punish Philip for the murder of the deputation," said the man.

Josiah started. "All were not murdered," he said, "for I, Josiah Blackstone, am here amongst you. I was taken prisoner, carried to Mount Hope, and—" he paused—"with Philip's aid I escaped." He would not tell of the torture he had undergone ; but continued, without noticing the astonishment his words occasioned, "If Colonel Willard is anywhere within reach we must get at him."

"Impossible, the Indians are all around ; if we attempt to move they will start up again."

Josh made no answer. The subject was discussed generally, and unanimously decided to be impracticable ; any man leaving the house would be seen and murdered. There was nothing to do but to wait, on the chance that

a fugitive from Brookfield would carry the news to the colonel.

Night fell, and still the savages remained quiet. Stephen was on guard at the back of the house when Josh appeared leading his horse.

"Surely you are not going to do it?" he said.

"I am going to try," answered Josh grimly. "I guess about where I can catch Willard. It will be sharp work; but if I succeed by to-morrow at this time he may have given those red devils a lesson which they will not forget in a hurry. I am afraid they will wake up and worry you to-morrow; be on your guard, and do your uttermost to hold out till evening. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," said Stephen. "It is awfully plucky of you. I hope you will get through; it is our only chance. But you hardly look fit for such a ride."

"I am tougher than you think," said Josh; "most men would look worse than I do if they had gone through what I have done," and he held out his hand.

Stephen wrung it, saying, "I'll unbar the back gate for you, it opens on to the water-meadows; the ground is soft, so that the horse's hoofs will not be heard if you walk him, and I believe the savages are on the other side in the forest. It is less than half a mile to the river, and a mile farther up it is so shallow that you can easily ford it; on the other side you will be comparatively safe."

"Thanks," said Josiah. "The night's dark; that is in my favour," and he disappeared.

Throughout that night and the following morning the Indians remained quiet; but soon after noon they emerged from the forest, dragging and pushing forward a sort of cart of enormous dimensions mounted on rudely-constructed wheels. Bundles of hay, flax, and hemp, besides other combustible materials, were piled in it to a great height. They brought the thing within a short distance of the house, screening themselves behind it from the shots

which the besieged fired down upon them. Then a party of Indians with long poles came running, shouting, and



“Be on your guard.”

yelling triumphantly out of the forest ; evidently they felt sure now of victory.

The besieged watched these preparations with painful anxiety, not daring to give expression to their fears.

Suddenly a cloud of smoke arose, tongues of fire leaped up, and the Indians, using long poles, began pushing the cumbersome vehicle nearer to the house. Then indeed the English knew they were lost. The men turned pale and looked aghast at the awful sight, and the women in their terror cried aloud to God to help them. Their doom was sealed ; either they must perish in the flames, or rushing out, be murdered by the savages. Slowly but surely the horrible machine came on, long tongues of fire already licked the front of the house, and the small amount of water the besieged were able to throw upon that great mass of combustible substance was of no avail ; besides, the heat would not allow of their opening the windows or ascending to the roof.

"Let us out, let us out !" shrieked the terror-stricken women.

"Nothing but the bursting of the clouds from heaven can save us," exclaimed Stephen in despair.

At that moment, above the cries of the women and children and the yells of the savages, there was heard a distant rumbling.

"What is it ? what new horror is coming upon us ?" cried several voices at once. Again it came rolling nearer and nearer, and some one said, "It is thunder !" Then an aged woman, raising her wrinkled hands, cried with a loud voice, "The Lord is with us ; who shall be against us ?"

But the rain, the blessed rain from heaven, would it fall and extinguish the flames, which kept rising higher and higher ? The trees of the forest waved, bowing before the coming storm ; the wind rose, and the house rocked under the fury of the elements ; and the women, falling on their knees, prayed, "Good Lord, deliver us !" and the men, uncovering their heads, prayed also. They were powerless ; God alone could save them !

If the rain held off only a little longer, it would be too late ! Already a buttress had caught fire, and at the risk of their lives the two Carters, father and son, with the aid of several other men, hewed at it to separate it from the main building. Suddenly a flash of lightning, so lurid that the whole heavens were illumined, followed by a crash of thunder, rolling as it seemed in the nethermost parts of the earth and in the heavens above, struck English and Indians alike with terror. The latter, throwing themselves with their faces on the earth, lay as if stunned. And then the clouds burst, a sheet of water poured down, a perfect deluge ! In the space of a few minutes the land was submerged, the fire was extinguished, and the burning mass reduced to smoking embers.

The besieged knew that for the present they were saved, and the Indians knew they were conquered by the "Great Unseen," and so, rising half drowned, they fled to the forest. As suddenly as the storm had risen so suddenly did it abate.

Then another sound reached the ears of the besieged, the tramping of horses' hoofs coming at full speed through the deserted village, and a troop of some fifty or sixty horsemen pursued the Indians, shooting and hewing them down. Many were slain, and those who escaped dispersed. Before sunset all fear was over for that brave little garrison, the house-doors were thrown open, and they came forth to welcome their rescuers.

"Josiah Blackstone ? where is Blackstone ? We owe our lives to him," said James Carter.

"Ay, verily we do !" shouted a chorus of voices.

"You say truly," responded Colonel Willard. "When he arrived at my camp this morning both he and his horse were dead beat ; he could not have ridden back with me. There comes a time when even the strongest man has to give in, and Josh Blackstone had reached that stage. Do you know where he came from ?

"From Mount Hope ; he was made prisoner by Philip, and escaped," said Stephen Carter.

"After running the gantlet, and coming out of it alive, which not one man in fifty succeeds in doing," said the colonel ; "and it seems to me he has been on the go ever since. No marvel if he dropped from his horse in a dead faint after he had delivered your message. He's a Spartan ! A cheer for brave Josh Blackstone !"

And the cheer went up right gladly, whilst the women brushed the tears from their eyes, and the men muttered in their beards, "He's a brave lad ! a right brave lad !"

All through that winter and the following spring and summer the war raged ; a reign of terror spread over the land.

When Josiah Blackstone reached his home he found the house burnt to the ground, the trees in the orchard felled, only the trodden-down grave of his grandsire left to mark where his inheritance had been.

Father, mother, Rena, were no more ! He stood desolate and alone. His father, he was told, had defended himself bravely ; more than one Indian had fallen by his hand ; but at last overpowered by numbers, he had been slain. Of his mother and Rena's fate he failed to learn anything ; they had disappeared. One thing he discovered, namely, that it was not the Wampanoags, Philip's tribe of Indians, who had wrought this destruction, but the squaw Sachem Weetamoo's, and Josh there and then made up his mind that he would follow her up and discover the fate of his mother and sister. The Plymouth Colony had put the conduct of all military affairs into the hands of Colonel Church, a friend of the Blackstones, and straightway Josh offered him his services, which were readily accepted, and he was enrolled in the corps, and rapidly rose to the rank of captain. The knowledge of Indian warfare he had gained from his friend was only equalled by Colonel Church

himself, and these two men, working together, became an absolute terror to the Indians, for they not only fought them with their own weapons of cunning and ruse, but with the superior arms of the trained soldier.

Gradually but surely the red men felt the weight of the white man's arm; they lost many of their best chiefs and warriors; they could no longer undertake large expeditions, but were reduced to a sort of predatory warfare. Twice in the course of a few weeks Philip was nearly captured; he fled, escaping in disguise, no one knew whither. But even then he would not yield. One of his chiefs venturing to propose that peace should be asked for, Philip ordered him at once to be put to death.

The sorely-tried population of New England would gladly have made peace. The strain of never-ceasing anxiety had whitened the heads of men still in their prime, and young men had even grown to look old. They could bear to die and suffer themselves, if need be; but their hearts ached for the women and children, above all for those who were missing and whose fates were dark mysteries.

"It will never end until that she-devil Weetamoo and her tool Philip are taken or killed, Josh," said Colonel Church, as they paced together in front of their tent, they having during the last few days pitched their camp near Tiverton in the North.

"If you can devise any plan by which this can be accomplished, I am ready," said Josh. "As far as it has been consistent with my duty, I have avoided Philip. I have told you how he saved my life. But for this squaw Sachem I have no such feeling, and I believe she is at the bottom of all this mischief."

Even as he spoke, an Indian came out from amongst a clump of trees and stood before them.

Always on his guard against treachery, Josh raised his musket.

"Stand!" he shouted.

"No fear; I have come to speak with you and tell you what you desire to know," said the Indian, halting at a safe distance.

"Who are you?" asked the colonel.

"I am the brother of the chief whom Philip slew because he spake of peace. I have lost two sons in the war; I have but one left, and he is a babe. I also would dwell at peace, so have I come to you that you may slay the squaw Sachem Weetamoo. She has but a few men left of her three hundred warriors, and when she is conquered I will lead you to Philip's hiding-place."

"How are we to know that you are true, and will not rather lead us unto our death?" said Colonel Church.

"My squaw and my babe are here with me," and he pointed to the clump of trees; "take them and slay them if I lie."

"Let it be so," said Church, with a glance at Josh; "fetch them."

The Indian disappeared.

"He's true; I know the man," said Josh.

Leading a fine boy of five, and followed by a squaw, the savage reappeared.

"It is well," said Church; "let them remain yonder. Now, what have you to tell us? We will reward you, and your wife and child shall be cared for; therefore speak without fear."

The Sachem Weetamoo is camped on the banks of the Matipoisett; her warriors are dead; she has but a score of men left. I will lead you to her this night."

"Let me go with him, colonel," said Josh eagerly. "This woman laid my home waste, slew my father, and has, may-be, kept my mother and sister in captivity; it is but right that I should capture her. Above all things, I would not run the risk of her being killed, I must question her."

"I am quite willing you should go; I am expecting reinforcements, and cannot move forward myself. Take twenty men, and let the Indian guide you," said the colonel.

In the briefest possible space of time, Josh was on his way with a small but well-armed force, for they reasoned the Indian might be numerically mistaken, and Weetamoo be stronger than he represented. The Indian led them along roads known only to native hunters, creeping through the forest stealthily as the tiger ready to pounce upon his prey; then they worked their way up towards the far-away river, where Weetamoo had taken refuge. The day was dawning when they came in sight of her camp, the outlines of the tents just visible through the river mist resting in white clouds over the marshy land. Quickly, noiselessly, with practised skill, Josh disposed his men along the river front and round the camp, in such a manner as to render escape almost impossible. The orders were, *not* to kill the savages, but to make them prisoners. This order applied more especially to the squaw Sachem; she of all others was to be taken alive. Then headed by Josh, a rush was made into the midst of the camp.

Aroused from their slumbers, wholly unprepared and unarmed, this last remnant of the three hundred warriors made but a faint resistance, and finding they could save their lives by yielding, they did so. At the first alarm a woman crept out of her tent through the long rushes. Quickly as a serpent she glided down towards the river. "Cowards!" she had hissed when she saw her people yield, and yet in her heart she knew they could not well do otherwise. Favoured by the mist, she had evaded the guard, reached the water's edge, when suddenly she lifted her head and looked back. Josh, feeling sure she would make for the river, was close at hand, and saw the passionate face and angry eyes flash out upon him. He sprang

forward ; but before he could reach her, with a shout of triumph she leaped into the water and was swimming rapidly down with the current. To throw himself in after her was the work of a second. He saw her disappear, thought she was lost, when lo ! she rose again far ahead of him. She had but dived, swimming under the water to scare him. Throwing out all his strength, he was gaining upon her, when to his horror he became aware they were approaching some rapids, where the river fell from a great height into a lake. The noise was terrific. He slackened speed, shouted to her, but either she did not or would not hear. She must have known full well the fate which awaited her ; but on she went, swept forward by the strong current, down over the brink into the dark lake below, and the rushing of the waters was the dirge of Weetamoo. It was with much difficulty that Josh succeeded in reaching the bank and walking back to the camp. His men were for giving him up as lost, especially when the Indians told them how and where that river ended ; his reappearance was therefore greeted with enthusiastic cheers, though the general disappointment at the escape of the squaw Sachem was great.

It had been agreed between Josh and Colonel Church that the latter should advance as soon as he had received the expected reinforcements, and that together they should go on to where the Indian stated Philip had taken refuge, namely, on a bit of upland at the south end of the swamp at the foot of Mount Hope. The day following the capture of Weetamoo's camp Church arrived, but without the promised reinforcements ; they had been delayed.

"I decided to come on all the same," said the colonel ; "for if we are to take him at all, it must be done quickly, or he will get wind of our movements and escape us."

"You are right," replied Josh ; "we must just do the best we can."

The following day they moved forward, and by night



“With a shout of triumph she leaped into the water.”

were within a short distance of the swamp. Josh, knowing the ground, went on in front with about twenty men, and stationed them, as far as their numbers would permit, at every outlet; then guided by the Indian, he and Church, with a mere handful of soldiers, crept up the hillside. The Indians were sleeping. They were roused by the firing of a shot; instantly all was confusion. Philip sprang to his feet, seized his gun, and rushed straight down the hillside towards the swamp, to the very spot where the Indian who had betrayed him stood, with an Englishman on guard. They both saw him and fired simultaneously. The Englishman missed the mark, but the Indian's bullet entered Philip's heart. He fell forward dead in the black swamp.

"I am glad I did not do it," said Josh, as he stood with Colonel Church looking down on the dead body of the King.

"And yet," said Church, "through him your house has been made desolate."

"That is our view of the war," answered Josh; "in his eyes we are the intruders. He but fought for what he considered to be his own, and where he could be generous he was. He did not slay my father; it was Weetamoo. I have no personal grudge against Philip; he was my friend. To such a nature as his our yoke was insupportable. It is well his spirit is set free; he could not have brooked captivity." And with a last look at the dead warrior Josh turned away.

So ended this great struggle, known as "King Philip's War." The white man had conquered; the Indian power throughout southern New England was broken; whole tribes and families of Indians had been destroyed; the remnants fled farther west into the unexplored wilds, whither the white man's foot had not yet strayed. The settlers gazed sadly around upon the ruins of their towns and homesteads; but they were brave men and women,

and looked the future steadily in the face. They had fought and bled for this New England, even as they would have done for the "old countrie," and they loved it all the better for the sacrifices they had made.

So Josiah Blackstone stood beside old William Blackstone's grave and thought. He was alone. "Should he build a new house, where the old one had stood? Should he replant the orchard with trees, in the hope of seeing them blossom and bear fruit?" It seemed dreary work; but a voice whispered that such as he, with youth and health and strength, were the marrow of the land, to build up and make strong with Christian faith what the heathen had overthrown; and taking up a pickaxe he struck it into the ground, saying in his heart: "So help me, God! I will rebuild my father's house; it is my duty." He set to work and laboured diligently, and a fair new house arose, and young saplings were planted where the old trees had been hewn down; and still men said, "Josiah Blackstone is a sad man!" and truly by day and by night he mourned. "If only my mother, and Rena, my little sister, had been spared to me!" but he could hear nothing of them, and they were to him as dead.

Friends counselled him to take a wife, and he pondered thereon; but no maiden pleased him, and he waited.

The weeks and months passed by, the harvest was gathered in, and it was very plenteous; and when the labourers had gone to their homes, Josh sat smoking in the porch of the new house, because it seemed less lonesome than in the empty rooms; and as he sat the sound of wheels fell on his ear, but he paid no heed thereto, until they stopped at his gate. Then looking up, he saw a covered cart. Out of it sprang a girl, tall and slim; then another. And last of all an older woman laid her hands on those young shoulders; but Josh, pushing them on one side, took her in his arms, crying, "Mother! my mother!" and he carried her over the *new* threshold to the living-



“He fell forward dead in the black swamp.”

room and placed her by the hearth ; and she kissed him weeping, with her arms about his neck, and Rena did likewise. But the maiden stood apart gazing wistfully, and Josh saw that it was Thusick, King Philip's daughter ! A moment he hesitated ; seeing which, his mother arose, and taking Thusick's hand, said : " She is my daughter ; but for her we had all perished. Now she has no home among her people, for they are all dead ; she must dwell amongst us, our God must be her God, our people her people. Shall it not be so, my son ? "

" It shall," answered Josh, " she is welcome. Philip was my friend, and she is a king's daughter."

And Thusick dwelt with them and was as one of them. When the orchard was white with apple-blossom, Love passed that way, and under the eaves of the *new* homestead was whispered an *old, old story !*

SIR RICHARD'S SQUIRES

By C. W. WHISTLER

JUST one month after I became squire to Sir Richard de Courci, then of the Castle of Stoke Courci, that lies between Quantock Hills and the sea in our fair Somerset, I met Alan de Govet, about whom my story mostly is.

We had been to Taunton, and were riding homewards across the hills, and valley and river lay straight before us—as fair a view as any in all England is that rich country between Mendips and Quantocks—yet I suppose that Sir Richard thought of it hardly at all, for he, as Queen Matilda's steward, was deep in all the new plans that were to set our exiled queen on her father's throne, and he rode thoughtfully after meeting De Mohun of Dunster that day.

But when we saw a gay little party of men in hunting dress, with hawks and hounds, come up the deep narrow lane to meet us, he roused, and turning to the twenty well-armed men behind us, asked who these were who came now.

None of them knew: but as they came nearer, I saw that the handsome young leader of the party wore the badge of the De Govets—a family from Yeovil, and well-known and loyal followers of King Stephen.

"Why, then," said my knight, "if this is young Dé Govet, I must have a word or two with him. Bar the road while we speak."

The men grinned, and closed up so that the lane was



“He came heavily to the roadside grass, where he lay stunned.”

full. There was little love lost, since Matilda's failure of two years ago, between the parties of King and Queen.

When we met, therefore, the hunting party must needs rein up, for they could not pass us.

"Pardon me, sir knight, but you bar the road," said the leader, raising his cap courteously.

"Only for the pleasure of speech with you," said my knight, saluting in turn. "I am De Courci, and I believe that I speak to Alan de Govet?"

The young man's face darkened as he answered, "Let me go my way, Sir Richard. I have nought to say to disloyal men."

"There are two sides to every question, young sir," the knight answered. "And since I am a Queen's man, and the De Govets are King's men, we have different views of what loyalty is. However, just now Stephen is king."

"Well, what would you with me?"

"Some time since I had a fair offer to make to your noble father—touching yourself—that is, if you are Alan de Govet. I have as yet had no answer."

The young man's face flushed angrily.

"Stand aside, sir," he said. "This is discourteous."

"Not if you are the man I take you for. Which, by the way, you have not owned as yet."

"I will own nothing, if thus asked," was the answer, and the stranger turned to his men.

But they had gone hastily at the first word about the rival claims of King and Queen, knowing what mostly came of such arguments nowadays.

Seeing which, he turned his horse leisurely, and without sign of fear, to follow them, and Sir Richard laughed, and rode alongside him, laying his hand on the horse's bridle.

"Stay—I must ask you to come to Stoke Courci with me, as your men have left you," he said.

In a moment the young man's sword was out, and

at the same instant he seemed to rise from his saddle, lose his balance, and fall away from Sir Richard. His blow was wasted on air, as he came heavily to the roadside grass, where he lay stunned.

"Bring him home carefully," said Sir Richard to his men. "If he is Alan de Govet, we must have had him as a hostage sooner or later. If he is not—well, a De Courci can but apologise."

So we rode on, and I asked Sir Richard, wondering, why so good a rider fell, as did this young man.

"'Tis an old trick," the knight said; "you do but get your foot under his and lift him at the right moment. But I would not advise you to try it with one heavier than yourself."

Now when we reached the castle, our prisoner was brought in after us, seemingly not much the worse for his fall, and the Lady Sybilla, Sir Richard's ward, and mistress of the castle since his wife died, asked me who he might be. And when I told her that he was thought to be Alan de Govet, but that he would not own his name, she flushed a little, and said no more. Next day I had reason to think that she had heard of him before this. Very fair was this young lady, and heiress of many broad acres. She seemed much older than myself, but a boy of sixteen will think anything over twenty a great age.

After breakfast on the next day I fed the hawks, and then came back into the great hall to see if my knight had any commands for me. There I found some sort of council on hand, and, from all appearances, no very peaceful one. Jehan of Stowey, the head man-at-arms, and one of his men guarded the two doors, and our chaplain, Father Gregorius, sat by the hearth, smiling uneasily. Sir Richard sat in his great chair on the dais, facing his prisoner, and by his side was the Lady Sybilla, who was plainly in a towering rage, for her eyes flashed, and her little hand was clenched as if she was holding herself in

check. And when I looked at De Govet, I saw that he was as angry as the lady. As for Sir Richard, he seemed



"Sir Richard sat in his great chair on the dais."

to be enjoying what was going on immensely, watching his prisoner with something of admiration for his fearlessness. Well built and square he was, though not so big

as our knight, who was almost a giant, as the De Courcis often are, and he looked like a warrior, even in his hunting gear, which was stained with red Quantock mud from his fall when he was taken.

Sir Richard took up the matter where he had broken it off when I entered.

"'Tis a mercy, Alan, that De Mohun of Dunster did not get hold of you. For that humour of yours of last night, when you would not own your name, would surely have landed you in the sachentege he keeps in his castle wherewith to wring answers from the silent. I would fain fit a more pleasant yoke to your neck," he said in a meditative way, watching De Govet's face amusedly.

Now of all the tortures that a Norman can invent, that of the sachentege is the worst; for the engine is made of a great beam of wood, fastened round the man's neck with a rough iron collar. As the beam is too heavy for one man to lift, and too long to be set on end, it is apt to wring confession of anything needed from him who is set therein after a time. Therefore I was surprised to hear the Lady Sybilla say suddenly—

"Borrow De Mohun's sachentege, I pray you."

"Fie, daughter," said Gregorius, shaking his head, but half smiling at the girl's anger. "It were a shame to set so gallant a youth in such bondage."

"Set me in the hateful thing rather," she said. "It were better than to marry me to this man of Stephen's, who would not own whatever name he has—being doubtless ashamed thereof."

At that De Govet started, and his face grew crimson. But Sybilla went on, growing more angry still.

"When Queen Maud comes I will go to her. She will see that I——"

"Hold," said Sir Richard suddenly; "enough of this. Go to your bower, girl, until you can be more patient with your guardian."

"Willingly," she said, with a proud toss of her head, and she swept out of the hall without a glance at us, and her waiting-woman followed her.

Then there was silence, and the knight and his captive looked at one another until a faint smile crossed De Govet's face. The chaplain looked anxious and disturbed, and it flashed of a sudden across my mind that if Queen Matilda was indeed coming to England shortly, it was the last thing that a King's man should have heard as yet.

Sir Richard tried to laugh, but it was uneasy.

"When do King Stephen and Maud his Queen come this way?" he asked Alan de Govet.

"When does Maud the Empress cross from Normandy?" retorted Alan.

Then both laughed. They understood one another by this time.

"Well," said Sir Richard, "shut up you must be, Alan, for a time at least. But if you will take my advice you will do as I wish you, and so find freedom and fortune as well."

"This is a pretty plan," said Alan. "Having caught a loyal King's man, you must needs marry him to your ward, you being Matilda's steward, whereby you save her fortunes when your new plots fail."

"Or yours when they succeed," answered Sir Richard. "Truly this is a pretty plan, as you say, and I am a benefactor to you both. Moreover, I think that you might seek further and fare worse."

"What is the benefit to yourself?" said Alan scornfully.

"Being a De Courci, I look for none, except may-be that to have a damsel in my charge hampers me somewhat; also, it is my duty to provide for her welfare as best I can. This is no new plan of mine, Alan. De Mohun or I were to take you sooner or later as a hostage, to ensure that your good father will bide quietly when

there is a little fighting on hand presently. I have only caught you by chance rather sooner than I hoped."

"Well," said Alan, "the lady seems to think ill of your plans for her welfare."

"That is because her advice was not asked," laughed Sir Richard. "Now, what say you?"

"It is plain that I have heard too much to be let loose," said Alan, "and I will not be married against my will. Wherefore you have me in your own power."

"The choice is between the bonds of matrimony and the small dungeon I have here, unless you prefer to be sent to Dunster, where De Mohun will take good care of you. I think the first choice is best."

"What sort of dungeon have you here?" asked Alan coolly on this. "I have no mind for Dunster."

"Let him see it," said Sir Richard to Jehan, and Alan turned on his heel and followed the man-at-arms from the hall without a word.

"One would have thought that the looks of the Lady Sybilla would have needed no comparison with those of any dungeon," said our knight with a great laugh, when he had disappeared. "But it is a good youth, and I am glad that De Mohun got him not, else he would have been in the rack by this time. But we may not let him go, now that yon headstrong girl has let out what she has."

Presently Jehan brought Alan back. The former was grinning, but the latter was cool as ever. His gay cordovan boots were wet and muddy, as if he had been over the ankles in water.

"'Tis a good dungeon," he said, "and no chance of escape therefrom. I have no mind to dwell in it, therefore I will offer ransom for myself."

Sir Richard shook his head.

"I took you, Master de Govet, for weightier reasons than those of gain."

"That is to your credit," answered Alan. "It is dis-

courteous to take an unarmed man by force, save for weighty reasons. Then I will pledge my word of honour not to escape if allowed reasonable liberty."

"Ho!" said Sir Richard, "is there no word about the Lady Sybilla?"

"We will not discuss that point further," said Alan loftily. "I do but seek to evade the dungeon."

"It seems that you know your mind, young man," Sir Richard said, "and I am willing to meet you as far as I may. If I take your word, you must promise also to hold no communication with the King's party."

"I will consider myself in the dungeon for that matter. They will not miss my help."

"I am not so sure," said the knight thoughtfully. "If you are my guest you may hear and see much that they would be glad to learn."

"Turn me out, then," said Alan promptly. "I know nothing as yet."

Again Sir Richard shook his head and laughed.

"I must keep my hostage, for I am not alone in this matter, and have to answer to others. Now, do I have your word not to escape, and to be silent?"

Alan stepped forward and held out his hand.

"The word of a De Govet," he said.

Now from that time forward Alan took his captivity in good part, sending by a chapman some message to his father which Sir Richard approved, and which satisfied those at home, for shortly after they sent him all that a guest could need, even to his helm and mail and charger. I do not know what his people thought of his being a guest with so noted a Queen's man as our knight, but at that time the great plans were secret, and none seemed to have any suspicion of them beyond the circle of the leaders of Matilda's party.

I soon learnt, having often to ride with messages to one leader or another, what these plans were, and I can

put them into few words. Earl Robert of Gloucester, our Queen's half-brother, was to rise at the head of all the nobles in the west, while King Malcolm of Scotland, her uncle, was to invade England from across the Border. Two years ago he had done the same, but failed for want of well-planned assistance, so that King Stephen was able to make terms with him. This had seemed the death-blow to Matilda's hopes at the time, but now things would surely go better. Stephen would be taken between two fires, and then the Queen would come from Normandy, and all would end in her favour.

So the great plotting went on, and meanwhile Alan de Govet and I grew to be great friends, for he was a good warrior, and took pains to teach me many things. Which pleased Sir Richard well, so that he seemed to forget that Alan was his captive, treating him always as a welcome guest.

The only person in all the castle, and village also, who did not like Alan was the Lady Sybilla, and she made no secret of her dislike. I thought it good of Alan to take the trouble to please her that he did, for we must needs see much of her. However, she was always most pleasant to me, and I liked to serve her in any way that I could. Father Gregorius was another friend of mine, and I learnt many things that a squire should know from him. He, too, liked Alan, and would often pass a sly jest on him about his choice between the dungeon and the lady's hand, at first. But as time went on Alan seemed to grow tired of the old jest, and waxed angry when it came. So Gregorius forgot it.

It was in April, towards the end, that I came to Stoke Courci, and from that time forward messengers came and went in much secrecy. Once Earl Robert came for a day from Dunster, with De Mohun; and once we rode to Wells to meet Roger, Bishop of Salisbury, the Justiciar, from whose help the Queen hoped much.

Now, in the beginning of July, I had been out with Sir Richard, and did not go into the castle when I had led the horses round to the stables, but sought Alan in the tiltyard, some one telling me that he had gone in that direction. And there I saw a thing that puzzled me, for it was unlike what one might have expected.

Two people walked under the trees on the far side of the tilting-ground, and they were the Lady Sybilla and Alan himself in deep converse. Alan seemed to be speaking a great deal and getting short answers; which was not surprising, as the lady was always proud and disdainful with him, so that Alan always seemed discomfited when she appeared. Just at this time, however, he did not seem so.

They did not see that I came, at first; and before they heeded me, I heard a few words.

"I will have nought to say to a man who is ashamed to own his own name," quoth Lady Sybilla.

"It was not shame, but policy," answered Alan.

"Ay—to escape from me."

Alan was silent for a moment, and then said—

"I have learnt to prize what once I had no thought of."

Then Sybilla saw me, and flushed.

"Ay—your name, you mean," she said to Alan, whose face was away from me. "Go to—win your name back by some deeds of arms, and then you may be worth speaking with."

With that she passed him and came towards me, beginning to hum some old tune or other lightly. As for Alan, he bided where she left him, not caring to follow.

"Come away," she said to me; "your comrade is in an evil temper."

"That is the first time I have seen him so," answered I; "needs must that I stay to cheer him; for I am not the cause of his ill-humour," and I laughed.

"Well then, go your way for an unmannerly squire," she retorted, turning away towards the castle.

"Nay, but, lady—" I began. But she went on quickly, with one last remark flung over her shoulder, as it were—

"I know where I am not wanted, at least."

"Now," thought I, "it is plain where the ill-temper lies." So I went to Alan, and asked what was amiss.

"Well," said he—for though he was five years or more older than I, we were close friends by this time—"maybe I am a fool to think twice of the matter; but, on my word, friend Ralph, one would think that I was in love."

I laughed heartily.

"Did you tell her so?" I asked.

"She has set me a task which, as a good squire, I am bound to undertake, whatever I may have said; and what chance a prisoner like myself has to do it, I cannot see."

"Winning a name to wit. I heard that much," I said. "But that we have often talked of. It does not need the words of a sharp-tongued damsel to set your thoughts in that direction."

"Your Saxon wits need sharpening with Norman whetstone," he answered gravely. "Know you not that the word of a fair lady has double weight in the matter of winning renown? So that one must straightway seek for what one might else have left to chance and good fortune."

"My Saxon mother-wit would tell me that all depends on who the lady who speaks the word may be," I answered, being used to a gentle jest of this sort from Alan, and by no means minding it, since I had well beaten him about the Norman pate with our good old Saxon quarter-staff—the one weapon whose use he disdained until I persuaded him to a bout with me. After which he learned to use it, because he said that it belonged to good forestry.

"Above wit comes the law of chivalry," he said then.



"I know where I am not wanted, at least."

"It matters not if the lady is queen or beggar-maid, so that her words be a spur to great deeds and knightly."

Now, when Alan began in this strain he was apt to wax high-flown, causing Sir Richard to laugh at him at times. So I said—

“This sounds well. But there is nought for you to undertake, that I can see.”

After that we sat and looked out to the long line of the blue Quantocks and spoke of foreign wars. But the time for brave deeds was nearer than we thought, for that night came a messenger with stirring news, and after speaking with him Sir Richard sent for us two.

“Alan,” he said, “I have strange news for you, and I do not know how you will take what I have to tell you. Nor do I rightly know what to do with you now. The other leaders of our cause will not suffer me to let you go free, as I would willingly, because they do your father the honour of thinking that his hand must be held. As for myself, I have forgotten that you are aught but a guest, and you please me.”

Alan smiled, and made a little bow at that, but said nothing.

“Now I must go northwards,” said the knight; “and at once. Ralph must see to my arms, and he will go with me, all the better squire for your companionship. There is a campaign on hand, as you may guess.”

“Northward,” said Alan thoughtfully. “Are the Scots on foot across the Border?”

“Ay; that they are.”

“Why, then, let me go with you and help fight them, Sir Richard. That is England’s quarrel—whether king or queen has right to the throne.”

Sir Richard smiled grimly.

“Mostly that is so. But now Malcolm comes again as ally of his niece, and with his help we mean to set her on the throne. I fear you will not fight on my side.”

“I cannot,” answered Alan. “I had hoped this was but some new Border raid or public quarrel.”

He was silent for a while as my knight told me what I had to prepare for the journey. But presently he spoke again—

“Let me go with you, Sir Richard,” he said. “You are most generous in your own wish to let me go free, and it is possible that in the far north, where there will be none to hinder you, you will let me join in one battle for my own king. I would return to you either in victory or defeat, if not slain. And if slain, any further trouble in keeping me is over.”

“This is a strange request,” said Sir Richard, watching Alan’s eager face. “You must be tired of our little castle.”

But I thought I knew why Alan was so ready to go north for a mere chance of fighting.

“Alan has a mind to do some mighty deeds or other,” I said. “We spoke thereof this afternoon.”

“When I came here I denied my name, as it were,” said Alan quickly, preferring not to be questioned perhaps, “and I must needs win it back. Let me prove that I am not to be ashamed thereof.”

“Nay, Alan. You withheld your name somewhat foolishly, may-be ; but you denied it not. None can blame you,” said Sir Richard kindly.

“Nevertheless it has been said that I must win it back, and, I pray you, let me have this chance.”

“Ralph,” said Sir Richard sternly, “is this your foolishness?”

“Not mine,” I answered. “’Tis but a poor jest of the Lady Sybilla’s.”

The knight looked at Alan and began to smile. Alan grew red and then angry, and Sir Richard laughed.

“So!” he said. “If that is the lady’s word, there is no help for it. But I knew not that you had used your leisure so well.”

Now why Alan had not a word to say for himself at

this I could not tell, but so it was. At last, after shifting from one foot to the other uneasily, he ceased his pretence at anger, and said—

“I am asking much, Sir Richard. But may it be so?”

“Come north at least, and we will see about the rest. If you fight for Stephen, however, you and I may be running tilt against one another unawares in some *melée*.”

“You have unhorsed me once, Sir Richard,” said Alan, in high glee, “and out of your way would I keep. Now, I do not know how to thank you.”

“Why,” said Sir Richard, “I am wont to need two squires, and have but one. If you are not too proud, journey as my second, and if aught is wanting in your gear I will supply it.”

“It is honour for any squire to serve the De Courci,” said Alan. “Your squire I will be in all good faith, until I must needs ask you to let me have one fight for whom I will.”

I was glad enough that Alan was to go with us, as may be supposed, and gaily went to work to set my lord's armour in order, while Jehan of Stowey saw to mine. And presently, while I sat alone in the armoury singing as I polished the heavy, flat-topped, war helm, the Lady Sybilla came in, and sitting in the window-seat, began to talk with me about our journey.

By-and-by I told her that Alan de Govet was to go with us at his own request, and that because of her words this afternoon. She seemed to care little, for she looked out of the window and spoke of somewhat that she saw thence in the meadows by the stream.

Yet presently she said—

“So this Alan must needs blame me for making him eager to run into danger?”

“Your words, he says, are weighty, as being those of a lady. But I do not think that he blames you at all, Lady Sybilla.”



“She seemed to care little.”

“Well,” she said, rising up suddenly, “as he must charge my words with his going, give him that to remind him that they are weighty.”

She threw me a blue silken scarf she had worn all day and went out of the armoury, and I saw her no more. I was glad that she seemed at least to be inclined to make amends for her haughtiness and ill-considered words.

Presently I gave the scarf, with the message, to Alan, and he seemed pleased with both, asking me for more of the sayings of the haughty damsel, which amused me.

"Verily, Alan, I believe that you spoke truth just now when you said you were in love," I said, laughing.

"Nay; but I hardly said so much," he answered. "Well, it is war first, and anything else afterwards, just now."

Nevertheless, when we rode away next morning, with forty well-armed and mounted men-at-arms and a little train of pack-horses after us, Alan had the blue scarf round his sword arm, and his eyes were over his shoulder so long as we could see Sybilla standing on the draw-bridge watching us go. May-be he had had another word or two with her, but I thought it foolish to pay so much heed to the gibes of a damsel, however fair.

Now I am going to say nothing about our long, pleasant journey northward, with the camping in forest or among hospitable farm folk, or, later, on wild moorland, for if I began I should not know how to leave out all the things that were new and strange to me.

But presently, when we were in Lancashire, we came to the tracts of desolation left by the Scots two years since, and a sort of dread grew up in my heart of men who could thus mar our fair land. Yet they were to help to set our Queen on her throne again, and those who had sent for them were wiser than I.

We went into no great towns, for Sir Richard did not wish men to inquire too closely into his journey and its object. But as we drew near Lancaster we learned that the gathering of the Scots to invade England was well

known, and already word had gone round to the sheriff from Archbishop Thurstan of York to bid them gather their men to him.

Then Sir Richard thought it time to give Alan his freedom, as he had half promised, for he himself must needs cross the Border to speak with the King of Scots. And it so happened that near the old town he fell in with a knight, whom Sir Richard knew to be a Queen's man, riding towards Lancaster with twenty men at his heels.

"Ho! De Courci, what brings you so far north?"

"The same errand that brings you out, most likely," our knight answered. "We will go further north yet in company, as I hope."

The knight stared for a moment, and then a grim look crossed his face, which was scarred here and there.

"If you mean to march with Thurstan, well and good—but if you are going to join the Scots, as is likely, you and I shall be on opposite sides for once," he said bluntly.

"How is this?—where is your loyalty?"

"Loyalty, forsooth!" the knight answered. "My first loyalty is to England—and I care not who sent for the Scots. We of the north will give life to keep them back." So these two talked, angrily at times. But at last the strange knight said—

"I tell you, De Courci, that if you of the west and south knew what Malcolm's host is like as well as we northerners, you would give your right hand sooner than bring them to England. Go and see them, and then mind my words."

So the talk ceased. But presently Sir Richard told Alan that if he would, he might ride in company with this knight, who would give him a worthy place as his squire, and with whom he might remain until we returned after the campaign.

"I can say to De Mohun and Earl Robert that I

have left you with this Sir John, and they will be content. May-be we shall meet again shortly, and then pass me by, I pray you, for the sake of comradeship, and—of that blue favour—however hot the battle may be.”

So Sir Richard jested, but we were sorry to part from Alan, and he from us, when we left him with his new friend in Lancaster. I think that his soreness on being a captive had long passed, for now he could only thank our knight for his many kindnesses.

We crossed the Border, and made for the gathering place of the Scots. And when I saw them I knew that the northern knight spoke the truth, and that the worst thing for our Queen would be that she should have the blame of bringing this wild crowd of savage Galloway Picts and Highland Gaels into England.

And our knight knew it also. He gave his message to Malcolm, as in duty bound, and then would bide with the Scots no longer. Truly there were a few good Lowland and Norman knights with the King and his son, Prince Henry, but not enough to keep that untrained force in any sort of control.

“Sir John of Swaledale is right,” Sir Richard said to me as we saw the wild clansmen gathered round their fires on the open hillside. “I am going to Archbishop Thurstan that I may do what I can to help to repair the wrong to England that we have done in calling in Malcolm again. You and Alan will fight for England side by side after all.”

That was most welcome news for me, and for all our western men. I do not know how Sir Richard made excuse for returning to England, but none hindered our going, and we were welcomed at Durham by the knights who were gathered there, King’s men and Queen’s alike having foregone their quarrel at the bidding of the wise archbishop, whose words I heard read in the open market-place.

Then the Scots began to come on very swiftly, and at last we fell back from Durham to the place where our chiefs, the Earl of Albemarle, and Walter de Espée, chose to check their advance, at Northallerton in Yorkshire, where they had made some weak entrenchments on a gentle hillside that commanded the road from the north.

There was Alan, and one need not say how he rejoiced to see us, and take his place as Sir Richard's squire again.

"After all," our knight said, "I and my two squires will fight on the same side for one cause. And I think that Sybilla will be pleased to hear from us how her champion bore himself."

"I said nought of pleasing the Lady Sybilla," said Alan gruffly.

"Why—no more you did! Yet I thought that something of the kind brought you north," laughed our knight.

Then Alan tried to excuse his little discourtesy, and the more he did so the more we laughed, until he must laugh with us.

Now the reports of the vast numbers of the Scots would have left little heart in our men, if it had not been for the wise words and devices of Bishop Ralph of the Isles, who was here in the sick archbishop's place. He had a great mast stayed up in a waggon that stood in the midst of camp, the top of which was surmounted by a flashing silver pyx that held the consecrated wafer, and under that floated the banners of the patron saints of York and Beverley, Durham and Ripon, that this northern host might see the tokens of all they held holiest and dearest, and fight manfully to uphold them. Then he was wont to stand in the waggon and speak to us, promising help spiritual to those who fought for their land and homes, and bidding us have no fear of a host whose

very greatness would hinder it, for want of discipline and order, either in victory or defeat.

So all were cheered, and though there is nothing at which men wonder more than at the swiftness of the advance of the Scots, we were ready for them before they came. Yet, but for Alan, it is certain that our army would have been surprised, and may-be cut to pieces, before any battle array could have been drawn up.

As the Scots came, they burnt and plundered on all sides, and at last our outposts could see the light of burning farms on the skyline, and we knew they were very near. Next night none were to be seen, and it seemed as if the Scots had halted and drawn together on finding that we were ready. Then the day following broke darkly and grey, with a dense fog everywhere that seemed to make it impossible that an army could move through it. Yet every horseman who could be spared was sent to patrol the hills to our northward, and Alan and I rode out together to our appointed stations with the rest, in the early morning.

We crossed valley and stream by tracks we knew well by this time, and as it happened, went further that day than any other, for one could see nothing but a few yards of stony track before one, and the cries of the curlews sounded wild round us, like the whistle of men to one another in the fog.

"What water is that I hear?" I said presently. There was a sound of a heavy rushing, but I knew of no brook here that would make that sound.

"It is more like the sound of a great flock of sheep," answered Alan, "but we have driven every one for miles."

Then our horses pricked their ears, and stared into the mist to our right front in a way that told us that other horses were near.

Alan held up his hand, "I hear voices!" he said. We listened, and presently I knew that what we heard

was the thunder of the feet of a vast host of men, and now and then a voice came faintly, though whence we knew not, for nothing confuses sound so much as fog.

"The Scots!" said Alan, turning to me with his eyes shining under his helm.

"It is not possible," I said; "how could they find their way through this mist?"

"Any shepherd they have caught could guide them. Anyhow, we must see if I am right."

"Let us ride back to camp and give the alarm," I said.

"And be laughed at—for every one would say as you, that it is not possible. And all believe that the foe has halted. Bide here while I ride on, and if I shout 'De Courci!' ride back for your life and give the alarm."

"Faith," said I, "where you go, I go. If we cannot see them, neither can they see us. We may get near enough to hear what tongue they speak, and that is all we need."

"Come then," said Alan.

So we rode, as the keener senses of our horses bade us, down the hill towards our right more or less. We had to leave the pathway, but in returning we could not miss it if we breasted the hill anywhere, for it ran all along its crest. At the foot of the long hill we stayed again and listened, and now the sound of the marching host was deadened, because they were yet beyond some rising land.

What happened next was sudden, and took us un-awares, for all the warning we had was a little crackle of deerskin-shod feet, and the snorting and restlessness of our horses.

Out of the mist seemed to grow half-a-dozen men silently and swiftly, and for a moment I sat and stared at them in amazement. They were the wild scouts of the enemy, the tartan-clad Pictish men of Galloway, belted with long claymores, shield on back, and spear or pole-axe in hand.

They halted suddenly, each where he stood and as he stood, staring at us, startled may-be as we were. Then one whistled shrilly, and cried in an eager voice, "Claymore!" and their weapons clashed as they went on guard and made for us in silence.

The whistle rang clear and echoed back, and then came a long roar of voices, and the sound of marching swelled up for a moment and then ceased altogether. The host had halted at the first sign of the enemy.

One minds all these things when in peril, and even as I noted this, Alan leant forward and snatched at my horse's bridle, swinging him round.

"Back!" he said. "What, are you dreaming? We have seen enough."

But a Scot was hanging on the other rein also, and only the plunging of the horse saved me from a blow from his long-handled axe.

"Be off, Alan," I cried; "I am hindered." And I drew sword and cut at the man who held me back, only wasting a good blow on his hide target.

But he left the horse's head and I turned him, to find that the wild figures were swarming round us, and that Alan was wheeling his great charger in a circle that no Scot dared enter.

"Uphill," he cried, seeing that I was free.

Then we spurred the horses and charged side by side, and they yelled and fell back before us. They feared the horses, and were unused to fighting with mounted men, and we won through them easily and galloped on up the hill.

Nevertheless the men of the heather were not to be shaken off so easily, but ran and leapt on either side of us, and as they ran, I saw one or two who had unslung bows, and were waiting, arrow on string, for a chance shot at us.

We began to distance them very soon, and at last





“The next thing I knew was that my good steed was down on his nose among the stones.”

only two grey figures strained to keep pace with us, and then an arrow rattled on Alan's mail, shot from not more than five paces' range.

"A weak bow enough," said Alan.

But if the Scottish bow was weak against mail, it could harm a horse, for the next thing that I knew was that my good steed was down on his nose among the stones, and I was lying half stunned before him, while those two wild Galloway kernes shouted and rushed at me.

Alan had shot on ahead as I fell, but in a moment he was round and back, saving me from the dirk of one man who was almost on me, with a quick lance-thrust. The other man, who was not so near, fled as he came, and we were alone. Alan dismounted and came to my help.

"Are you hurt?" he said, lifting me.

"Not much,—but the horse—how about him?" I asked.

"Not much either—for he has gone."

And indeed he had picked himself up and fled into the mist towards the foe.

"Mount behind me," said Alan, helping me up. Then I groaned and reeled against him. My ankle was sorely bruised by a rock on which it had been dashed in my fall, and at that time I thought it was broken, for I could not stand.

"Hold up, and I will help you mount," said Alan. And then the Galloway men swarmed out of the fog again, cautiously at first. Some waft of wind had thinned the hanging clouds for a moment, and Alan saw them sooner than before.

"Leave me—warn the camp," I said.

"The honour of a De Govet——"

And that was the last I heard of what Alan was about to say, for with the first step towards the saddle I fainted.

When I came to, with the cold air rushing on me, the

first thing I saw was Alan's steadfast face above me, stern set and anxious, but unfaltering in gaze forward, and under me bounded the free stride of his great charger as though the double burden was nothing. Alan's left arm was round me, and I was across his saddle, while he was mounted behind it. He had no helm, and a stream of blood was across his face, and an arrow, caught by the point in the rings of his mail, rattled from his breast. His lance was gone, and his red sword hung by the sling from his wrist as he managed the bridle.

I stirred, and a smile came on his grim face.

"Art thyself again?" he said. "We are close on the camp."

Then he lifted his voice and shouted—I had a dim remembrance then that that shout had rung in my ears just as I came round—the old war-cry of his forebears at Hastings—and our knight's name.

"Dex aie—De Courci—ho!"

And a murmur and then a shouting rose as our men heard and understood, and a dozen knights spurred forward to meet us and brought us in, scattering to take the news to the leaders as we passed the line of entrenchments, so that our tidings went before us.

Alan took me to our tents, and there was Sir Richard waiting, as he buckled on his sword. With him were two or three more knights, who gazed constantly at the mist as if trying to pierce it. The men were getting to their appointed posts as the alarm spread, with a quietness that told of anything but panic.

"Ho, Alan, you have been in close action," our knight said anxiously. "Are you or Ralph hurt?"

"A brush with some wild Galloway kernes, nought more," Alan answered, lowering me carefully into the strong grasp of Jehan of Stowey. "Have a care of the hurt foot, Jehan. That is all that is amiss, Sir Richard."

But I could not have Alan's doings set aside, and I told Sir Richard plainly how he had rescued me from the swarm of wild men who followed us.

Then came one whom I knew well by sight, our leader, the Earl of Albemarle, eager to hear from the mouth of Alan himself what he had learnt of the Scots.

And even as Alan told him, the mist began to lift under a breeze that sprang up. The white hanging cloud-wreaths fled up the hillsides whence we had ridden, and left them clear and bright—and already on the nearer rises the Galloway scouts were posted, and our pickets were coming in at full speed.

Then the Earl grasped Alan's hand and said—

“No time for more now—but you have saved a panic, and what comes therefrom. I will see you hereafter, if we both outlive this day; and if I fall and you do not, I will have left orders concerning you with others.”

Then, as he saw the great waggon with its wondrous banner being drawn to the centre of our line, followed by Bishop Ralph and his clergy in their robes, he said—

“To your posts, knights—it will not be long that we have to wait now.”

He rode away, and the men cheered him as he passed along the front of the line.

Then a squire said to Alan ruefully—

“I would I had as fair a tale to tell my lady as have you. She of the blue favour has whereof to be proud in her champion.”

For there is little jealousy among the honest northern knighthood.

Then I saw that Sybilla's blue kerchief was round Alan's sword hilt, stained and rent, and Sir Richard caught my eye, and we both smiled. Alan made no answer, as the squire rode away after his lord.

Jehan brought Alan a new helm, and he and our knight went to their places in haste.

"Follow if you can sit a horse," Sir Richard said to me kindly.

And it is not to be supposed, that with Jehan's help in getting into the saddle, I would be anything but able to do so. One is not so dependent on stirrups as one is apt to think sometimes.

Now so many have written about the Battle of the Standard that I will not tell it again. It was all confused to me, and I could see but little of all that went on from where I was, just behind our knight, in the close ranks of the horsemen who were massed before the standard itself, where Bishop Ralph and his clergy remained unmoved, though the arrows rattled round them at times. It had been wonderful to see the whole army kneel as the good bishop blessed and shrived us all, and wonderful, also, to hear the "Amen" that rolled like low thunder down our ranks.

After that we bore for two long hours the shock of the wild clansmen, whose chief had sworn to go as far through our ranks that day as any of the mailed Lowland knights who despised his tartan. I think he kept his oath, for our footmen were borne back at first, and for a while things looked black for us.

Then the bowmen of the north shook themselves free from the confusion, and got to work, and the terrible rain of the long arrows drove back the Scots, whose rallying cry of "Albyn—Albyn!" failed them at last, and then our charge broke them and ended the day.

As we swept forward I saw a group of mail-clad knights round one whose helm was circled with gold, and I knew from the heather-topped spear that was his standard, that Prince Henry was before us. And I saw him turn to fly.

Presently, as we rode back, the Earl beckoned to Sir Richard.

"I would fain knight that brave squire of yours, De Courci, but——" he said, and stopped short.

"I know your difficulty, Lord Earl," our knight said, with a grim smile. "I am too well-known a Queen's man, and you must answer to Stephen for what honour you bestow. However, Alan de Govet is as good a king's man as yourself——"

They rode apart, and how much more Sir Richard told the Earl I cannot say, but they were merry over whatever it was. And the end of it all was in the solemn knighting of my comrade, together with some half-dozen others, before all the host, and at the foot of the great standard; of which I was as proud as if the golden spurs had been put on my own heels. The Earl spoke kindly to me also, telling me that I had yet a deed or two to do before I was old enough to win the same honour, so that I was well content.

The army began to break up in a few days, when all fear of rallying by the Scots was over, and then Sir Richard spoke to Alan of what was to come next.

"I took Alan the simple squire," he said, "and here is Sir Alan de Govet, my friend and good comrade. Wherefore old promises may be foregone, and I will only ask one thing instead, and that is that you will bide with the Earl, who will see to your advancement; for I must at least keep you away from De Mohun and the rest, else they will blame me."

Alan grew grave for a moment, and I saw his eyes go to where his sword hung on the tent-pole. Sir Richard saw that also, so he went on—

"I will tell your father what honour you have found here, and Ralph will tell—other folk at Stoke Courci. Have no fear that there will be trouble because you have not returned."

Alan smiled then.

"It was a good day when you took me, my knight," he said. "If only I may be counted as your friend when the troubles are over, I am well content."

"Ay, there will always be welcome for you with us."

So we parted, heavily enough, not knowing when we should meet again. There was trouble over all the land as we rode westwards; yet Stoke Courci was safe and quiet, because it was held by a lady only.

And when Sybilla, standing by the drawbridge, saw us come home, her bright face changed as she missed Alan from among us. Presently I told her all that he had done, but she was too wilful to seem glad that he was honoured.

"Well, there is some good in him, after all," she said, and so left me. Unless it was that she repented her old injustice to Alan, I could not tell why she had been weeping when I met her an hour or two later.

We might not stay long at Stoke Courci, for there was fighting over all the land. And at last, far away under Lincoln walls, where I won my spurs at the taking prisoner of King Stephen, I met Alan face to face in thickest fight; whereat we laughed and saluted, and passed to either side. I heard Sir Richard hail him also. There were many such meetings in those days.

Presently I saw Alan again—brought in as a prisoner taken with the King, downcast and almost despairing, for all his cause seemed lost. Then Sir Richard made himself surety for his safe keeping, and he was content to promise to bear arms against our Queen no more.

"Now, I must bestow you somewhere," said our knight. "And we have, as you know, a good dungeon at Stoke Courci. There was also a fair alternative to the said dungeon, if you have not forgotten."

Alan laughed a little then.

"I am a ruined man, Sir Richard, now, and can surely make choice no longer."

"Why, Alan, should I have spoken of it had I not meant to tell you that you may yet choose?"

One might see from Alan's face what he thought, but he said, looking at me—

"I am not so sure that I should be welcome at Stoke Courci."

"Come and see," quoth I, having reason to believe that he would be more than welcome, as one might say.

So we rode homewards together, and Sir Richard's plans fell out as he had wished, and that with no unwillingness on either side.

But, as every one knows, we had not done with King Stephen yet, and there were many years of trouble to come after he escaped. Presently he gained the day, and then it seemed likely that my knight and I might lose our lands. But, for the sake of the Battle of the Standard, we were passed over; and now, with the coming to the throne of King Henry, we are high in favour, with broad lands here in Somerset for me, and lands and castles here and in Kent for the De Courci who had served the Queen so well through good and ill.

THE SLAVER'S REVENGE

By HARRY COLLINGWOOD

Author of "The Log of a Privateersman," &c. &c.

CHAPTER I

THE BEGINNING OF THE ADVENTURE

YOU ask me to relate to you the most terrible adventure I ever experienced? Well, my whole life, from the time when, as a lad of fifteen, I first took to the sea, has been one of adventure, and I have passed through several rather thrilling experiences, so that it is not quite so easy a matter as you may imagine for me to say, off hand and at a moment's notice, which was the most terrible of them all. But, as you seem anxious for a yarn, I will tell you of an adventure that befell me shortly after I received my first command.

I was serving on the West Coast at the time, and, when this yarn begins, held the position of third lieutenant on board the *Narcissus*, a corvette belonging to the slave squadron. It was in the year 1826, just two years after slave-trading had been declared to be *piracy* in the eye of the law, and its perpetrators subject to the punishment of death if caught in the act. Popular feeling at home was very strong upon the subject; the sympathy of the nation had been powerfully aroused by the stories which from time to time found their way into the papers of the sufferings inflicted upon the blacks in the process of converting them into slaves; strenuous orders had been sent

out to us to be unsparing in our efforts to suppress the infamous traffic ; and we were all as keen as hounds in our endeavours to run down and bring to book the rascals who openly laughed at and defied us.

My adventure may be said to have commenced with a slice of luck that befell us in this wise. We were cruising at the time in the neighbourhood of Cape Lopez, standing close-hauled to the northward under easy canvas, when, about three bells in the afternoon watch, the look-out aloft reported a sail broad on our starboard bow. We could see nothing of her from the deck, so I took my glass and went up on to the fore top-gallant-yard, from which position I made out the craft to be a smallish schooner, with stumpy but very raking spars upon which was spread an enormous show of canvas. My first look at her satisfied me that she was a slaver ; and the fact that she was steering to the westward under every thread that she could show to the hot, languid breeze, was proof enough that she had a cargo of slaves under her hatches. Of course I lost no time in reporting my convictions to the skipper, and in another instant all was bustle and activity on board the corvette as we crowded sail in chase.

As the afternoon wore on, the wind fell light ; but so well was the corvette handled that when at length the sun went down in a clear sky, giving promise of a breathless night, we had the satisfaction of seeing that the slaver was helplessly becalmed, as was our own case soon afterwards.

Some time before this, however, I had observed Captain Pascoe and our first luff in close confabulation ; and shortly after the golden orb of the sun had disappeared beneath the horizon the former beckoned to me and said—

“ Mr. Farmer, I believe we are about to have a fine, calm night ; I have therefore determined to send the boats away to capture that schooner ; and I intend to put the

expedition under the command of Mr. Richardson"—the first lieutenant—"with you to second him. Have the goodness, therefore, to proceed at once with the necessary preparations, as the boats will shove off the moment that it is sufficiently dark to conceal your movements. I have no doubt the fellow will expect you, but it is hardly worth while to tell him plainly what our intentions are."

Our preparations were soon made and I then dived below, snatched a hasty substitute for dinner, in the shape of some cold meat and pickles, and was all ready, with my sword belted to my side, and a brace of freshly-loaded pistols stuck in my belt, in time for the skipper's inspection of our little party prior to shoving off.

Captain Pascoe waited patiently until the darkness had closed down upon us sufficiently to completely hide the chase from even his penetrating gaze, and then he gave the word to shove off; whereupon away we went, with muffled oars, and the boat binnacles so carefully shrouded that we felt perfectly secure against our presence being betrayed by any stray glimmer of light emanating from them. The master had taken the bearings of the schooner with the utmost nicety just before she disappeared in the darkness, and he gave us the course which we were to steer.

Our expedition consisted of the first cutter and the gig, under Mr. Richardson, and the second cutter and the jolly-boat, under my command; the whole mustering forty-eight hands, all told, including two venturesome midshipmen who, preferring the excitement of a scrimmage to the more solid delights of dinner, had begged permission to be placed in charge of the gig and jolly-boat respectively.

We had been pulling about half-an-hour when the dull muffled roll of sweeps became audible, and upon listening intently we discovered that the schooner was sweeping away in a southerly direction, or at right angles to the course which we were steering. We therefore shifted our helm to cut her off.

The men now bent to their oars with a will, keeping up a steady but fairly fast pace for an hour, by which time we were able not only to distinctly hear the roll and splash of the sweeps, but also to see the schooner as a small, vague, indefinite shadow of deeper blackness against the dark background of the overcast sky. The rascals had taken in every thread of canvas, so that it was only her hull we saw; but having once sighted this, we never again allowed our glances to stray from it.

We had arrived within about a quarter of a mile of our quarry, and were congratulating ourselves upon having so far escaped detection, when a voice from the shadow hailed us in Spanish, demanding who we were and what we wanted.

"Oars!" murmured the first luff, in tones of deep but suppressed excitement; "do not answer! not a sound, for your lives!"

About half a minute of intense anxiety now ensued, when the hail was repeated; and immediately afterwards the ghastly blue-white radiance of a portfire lit up the scene, distinctly revealing the hull, spars, and rigging of the schooner, with the figure of the man who held the firework standing by the fore rigging, one hand grasping a backstay, and the other holding the portfire high above his head, with sparks shooting and dropping into the water alongside, and the white smoke curling lazily upward between the naked masts.

"Boats ahoy!" hailed the voice again, "if you do not instantly sheer off I will open fire upon you! Do you hear?"

"What does the fellow say, Farmer?" demanded Richardson; "you understand that lingo, don't you?"

I translated; whereupon he murmured—

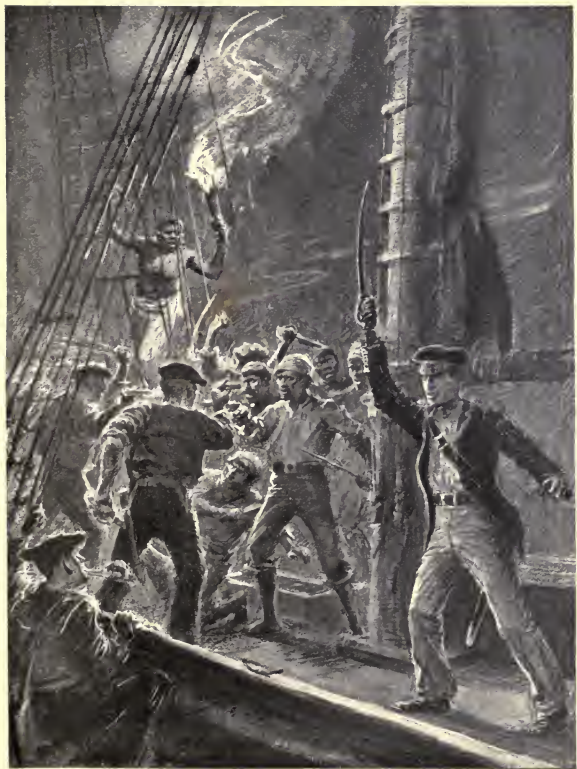
"Oh yes, my hearty, we hear well enough; but we shall just have to take our chance. Give way, men, with a will! At them before they have time to recover from

their surprise ! You will board on the port side, if you please, Mr. Farmer."

"Ay, ay, sir !" answered I. "Bend your backs, my lads, and let's get alongside ! Marines, stand by to return their fire if they open upon us !"

I was in hopes that, having recognised our strength, they would see the folly of resisting us ; but they did not ; on the contrary, they gave us a broadside of four guns—six-pounders they sounded like—and at the same time opened upon us a confused fire of musketry. One of the men in my boat gave a gasping groan as he dropped his oar and reeled off his thwart into the bottom of the boat ; but we had no time to attend to him just then, for in another minute we were alongside, and I sprang over the low bulwarks of the schooner, closely followed by the men of my own division, as Richardson, with his two boats, swept under the stern to board on the starboard side.

We were met by a ragamuffin crowd of swarthy, black-haired, fierce-eyed ruffians, rendered visible by the light of a second portfire which a burly negro held aloft, who greeted us with a lively popping of pistols, followed by a great brandishing of cutlasses and knives. But our fellows meant making short work of the job, and laid about them with such energy and good-will that the Spaniards almost instantly gave way before us, only to find themselves attacked in the rear by the first luff and his party. This was altogether too much for them : they flung down their weapons and bolted incontinently for the fore-scuttle, down which they tumbled helter-skelter, one on the top of another ; and almost before we were able to realise our success we were in possession of the schooner.



“We were met by a ragamuffin crowd of swarthy, black-haired, fierce-eyed ruffians.”

CHAPTER II

THE CAPTURE OF THE "ST. IAGO DE CUBA"

OUR prize turned out to be the *Don Cristoval*—a craft notorious alike for her astounding sailing powers, for the insolent daring of her commander, and for the success with which she had hitherto eluded all our efforts to over-haul her. Her capture, therefore, was quite a feather in our caps, altogether apart from the fact that two hundred and forty-four negroes were stowed under her hatches, for whom we should in due course receive head-money. Brief as the struggle for her possession had been, it had not been altogether bloodless; for when we came to investigate, it was discovered that we had three men wounded, while, on the side of the slavers, their loss amounted to two killed and seven wounded, one of them being their skipper, the infamous Captain Lenoir—a Frenchman—whose skull I had cloven upon the instant of boarding, and who was found to be so desperately hurt that there appeared but little prospect of his surviving to take his trial.

Having secured our prisoners, and made the wounded as comfortable as possible, we made the pre-arranged signal of success by hoisting three lanterns, one over the other, at the mainmast-head; after which we got the canvas set, and then disposed ourselves to wait as patiently as might be for a breeze to spring up and enable us to close with the corvette. Meanwhile, having nothing better to do, we released the cook and bade him go to work to cook the best dinner—or supper—for us that the resources of the ship would permit.

It was not until some time after midnight that a soft, warm air came stealing out to us from off the land; and then we obtained an insight into the marvellous sailing

powers of our prize that was a revelation to us. With a breeze so light that it had not strength to keep the main-sheet taut, the little witch sneaked along through the water at a good four and a half knots, with scarcely a ripple under her sharp bows to indicate that she was moving! We closed with the *Narcissus* about an hour later, when Mr. Richardson went on board—taking the wounded with him—to report, and to receive the skipper's instructions in reference to the prize. Shortly afterwards a boat came alongside with a request that I would proceed on board the corvette, leaving the prize in charge of one of the midshipmen. This I did, and, upon my arrival, discovered that our good-natured "first" had spoken so highly of my conduct that I was appointed prize-master, with instructions to select a crew of ten men, to return to the schooner with all speed, and to make the best of my way to Sierra Leone, there to await the arrival of the *Narcissus*. These orders I carefully carried out, arriving in the roadstead two days later, and exactly thirty hours in advance of the corvette.

The *Don Cristoval* having been captured with negroes actually on board, the Mixed Commission promptly condemned her, while her crew were committed for trial; and upon the day following her condemnation I learned that the schooner had been purchased into the service for use against some of her equally notorious sisters. There was one craft in particular—a barque named the *Josepha*—that we were especially anxious to lay hands upon, as hitherto she—or rather, her skipper—had simply laughed at and defied us; but now, with the *Don Cristoval* in our possession, it was confidently believed that we should at length succeed in capturing the too-successful barque, and bringing her insolent commander and crew to justice.

To capture such a craft would be fame indeed, and would almost certainly mean promotion as well—imagine, therefore, if you can, the delight with which I shortly

afterwards received the intelligence that, through our skipper's representations, *I* had been appointed to the command of the *Don Cristoval*!

So rapidly did I push forward our preparations that on the eighth day after our arrival we sailed again, my instructions being to thoroughly beat up every known spot frequented by slavers, and especially to keep a sharp look-out for the *Josefa*.

"From information received" I had been enabled to accurately fix the date of the barque's last visit to the coast, from which I had no difficulty in calculating pretty closely when she might be expected in those waters again; and finding that I had plenty of time, I determined to stand to the southward and take a look in at the Congo, gradually working my way northward again from there.

We made rather a long passage of it, taking things very quietly, in the hope that we might encounter some slave craft either making or running off the coast, in which case I hoped that ignorance of the fact that the *Don Cristoval* had fallen into our hands might enable us to make one or two very easy captures. But no such luck befell us, and it was not until we arrived at Banana—a small trading settlement at the mouth of the Congo—that we sighted a craft of any kind. There, however, anchored off French Point, at the mouth of Banana Creek, we came upon quite a little fleet, numbering eight sail in all, three of which were undoubtedly honest traders, beamy, round-bowed, motherly-looking craft, the best of which might possibly be capable of going seven—or maybe eight—knots with a gale of wind over her quarter; while the remaining five—consisting of a slashing brig, two smart brigantines, and two as wicked-looking schooners as I ever set eyes on—were as undoubtedly slavers. But in hoping, as I did, that I should catch some of these gentry napping, I was reckoning without my host; whether news of the capture of the *Don Cristoval* had already got wind and been spread

along the coast, or whether there was something in the set of the schooner's canvas or our method of handling her that aroused their suspicions, I could not tell, but certain it is that when I boarded them their skippers one and all produced papers which certified to their absolute honesty, while they were virtuously indignant at the doubts which led me to intimate that I must nevertheless take the liberty of overhauling their holds. Of course no opposition was raised—they were fully aware that anything of that kind would have been worse than useless—but many a scowling look did I intercept, and many a muttered execration reached my ear as I proceeded with my search. Needless to say that my labour was all in vain; the rascals had been too smart for me; I found neither irons, nor farina, nor any excess of water-casks on board any of them to give colour to the suspicion that they were otherwise than honest; but all the same I was perfectly well aware that there was neither palm-oil nor ivory in anything like sufficient quantity in Banana to account for the presence of so many craft off its wharves. And upon my hinting as much to one of the traders ashore, he frankly admitted that such was the case, but he explained that large quantities of both were on their way down to the coast, and might be expected to arrive at any moment. I remained at anchor there for the next three days, prowling about on shore—taking the precaution to always go well armed—and exploring in a boat the intricate network of creeks in the neighbourhood, but I made no discoveries; and the only incident worthy of note that occurred during this period was the sudden sailing of one of the schooners within three hours of our arrival.

On the evening of the third day I weighed and stood out to sea under a press of canvas, hauling up to the northward as soon as I had cleared the mouth of the river, carrying on until dark, in the hope of impressing those who I knew were watching me, with the belief that

I had somehow obtained important intelligence upon which I was acting. But as soon as the night had closed down upon us sufficiently to conceal our movements, I wore round and stood to the southward again, finally anchoring in seventy fathoms of water at a distance of some twenty-two miles north-west of Padron Point. Having done this, I ordered the royal, top-gallant, and topsail yards to be sent down, and the fore-topmast to be housed, after which there was nothing for us to do but to possess our souls in patience and wait for some of the slavers to come out and fall into our clutches, as I felt confident they would in the course of a day or two, provided that in the meantime no inward-bound craft hove in sight to tempt us from our watching-place, or to slip past us and give the alarm. And I had every justification for this feeling of confidence, for two nights later, as I was in the very act of going below to turn in after chatting with the youngster who acted as my "first," and who was in charge of the deck, the look-out aloft hailed—

"On deck, there!"

"Hillo!" I responded; "do you see anything?"

"Well, I ain't *quite* certain yet, sir, but for the last ten minutes I've been thinkin' that there's a small spot of darkness showin' out again' the sky right ahead, and I thought I'd better let you know, sir," was the answer.

"Quite right, my lad," I responded. "Keep your eye on it, and I will send up the night-glass to you by way of the signal halliards."

"Ay, ay, sir," the fellow answered; and in another half-minute the glass was bent on and making its way aloft to the gingerly swaying away of the quartermaster, while a faint murmur of eager anticipation came floating aft from the fore-castle upon the heavy, damp night breeze, which was blowing off the land.

For several long minutes after the instrument had reached its destination we were kept upon the tenter-

hooks of suspense ; but at length another hail, in low, cautious tones, came down from the mast-head—

“On deck, there! there’s *something* coming out of the river, sir! No mistake about it *this* time, because her canvas has just shut out a star that’s risin’. And she’s comin’ along fast, too, sir; I can make her out quite distinct with the naked heye.”

“Capital!” I exclaimed; “that is good news indeed! Can you make out how she is heading?”

“Well, only in a general sort of way, sir,” was the reply. “She’s steerin’ this way, o’ course, but she’s edgin’ away to the nor’ard too. I reckon that if we stays where we are now, she’ll pass us about a matter of three or four mile to the nor’ard.”

“Very well,” I responded. “Keep your eye upon her; do not lose sight of her for an instant. Now, Mr. Adams,” I continued to the midshipman in charge of the deck, “have all hands called, if you please, and let some of them man the capstan and get the anchor to the bows, while the rest get the fore-topmast on end and the yards across. And, remember, they will have to see with their *hands*, for no lights whatever must be shown. With only ordinary care we ought to nab that fellow easily.”

And we did, regulating our movements so accurately that, although we were soon afterwards discovered, we contrived to get alongside her within an hour, ranging up on her weather quarter and hailing her to heave-to, which she did without attempting any resistance; and a few minutes later we found ourselves masters of the *St. Iago de Cuba*—the brig I had boarded in the river—with three hundred and eighty-four slaves in her hold! I could spare but a very small prize crew to take her into Sierra Leone, I therefore took the precaution to put the whole of her people in irons; having done which, I sent her away in charge of my senior mid and ten men, giving him instructions to carry on day and night until his

arrival. This done, we parted company, and I returned to my former lurking-place off the mouth of the Congo, where I was next day fortunate enough to capture a fine brigantine with three hundred and twelve slaves under hatches.

CHAPTER III

"CAPITAN ST. CROIX"

THE prize crew necessary to man this second capture left me so very short-handed that, after due consideration, I decided to escort her to Sierra Leone in the schooner, which would enable me to get my men back quickly, and would at the same time afford me an opportunity to replenish my stores and water. This I accordingly did, arriving only a few hours later than the *St. Iago de Cuba*. I soon had reason, however, to regret the decision at which I had arrived, for several unexpected difficulties arose over the adjudication of my prizes, involving so serious a delay that when at length we got to sea again I was tormented with anxiety lest the *Josefa* should have arrived upon the coast, shipped another cargo of slaves, and slipped off again ere I could obtain news of her. I had been given to understand, however, that, although somewhat erratic in her movements, she chiefly frequented the Congo; I determined, therefore, to make the best of my way back to that river in the first place, trusting to chance for information as to her whereabouts upon my arrival.

I was not destined, however, to wait so long, for while slipping across the Gulf of Guinea, in the latitude of the island of St. Thomas, we sighted a small felucca, to which we at once gave chase. This craft, however, instead of attempting to avoid us, promptly bore up and came running down to meet us. She ran down across our stern,

and, in response to my hail, rounded to on our lee quarter, lowered her single lateen sail, and launched a boat from her gangway, in which her skipper, with two hands as boat's crew, presently pulled alongside us. The man—a bare-footed, decidedly unclean, and rather disreputable-looking Frenchman, attired in a suit of once white nan-kin, topped by a broad-brimmed straw hat—appeared to be labouring under much ill-repressed excitement as he climbed our low side and stepped in on deck, casting quick, anxious glances about him as he did so. When, however, his gaze encountered me—I was wearing my uniform cap at the moment—his anxiety appeared to subside to a considerable extent, and he at once doffed his hat as he made me a sweeping bow, exclaiming at the same time—

“Bon jour, monsieur ! Have I ze honour to address an officer of Grand Bretagne ?”

“Yes, sir, you have, if you choose to put the matter that way,” I replied. “This vessel is his Britannic Majesty's schooner *Curlew*, late the *Don Cristoval* ; and my name is Farmer. Am I correct in supposing that you have boarded me because you stand in need of assistance ?”

“Ah, oui, monsieur, it is so,” was the reply, given with much gesticulation. “I have been hoping to fall in wiz a Breetish man-o'-war evaire since I have sailed from ze Congo ; it is two day since. Saire”—here the fellow's excitement began to grow upon him again—“I desire revenge ! I have been rob, saire, by one rascal pirate who come alongside my leetle sheep, as I sail out of ze Congo ; he board me, saire, with un bateau full of men, arm to ze teeth, as you Angleesh say, and he take from me all my cargo of ivory and caoutchouc, leaving me wiz only my leetle eighty barrel of palm-oil. Saire, I am ruin unless you will get back my ivory and caoutchouc for me !”

"I shall be very pleased to do my best for you, certainly, if you can put me on the track of the pirates who robbed you," answered I. "Where did they go after they had cleared you out?"

"Saire," answered the Frenchman eagerly, "dhey did sail right into ze Congo river, where dhey are doubtless now shipping a cargo of esclaves. I know ze sheep well, for I have often see her when I have been waiting for my ivory to come down."

"Oh!" exclaimed I interestedly, "so she is a slaver as well as a pirate, is she?"

"Yais, yais, pirate and slavaire both, monsieur," answered the Frenchman. "She is a large—what you call, eh?—un—un—*barque*—oui, monsieur, a *barque* call ze *Josefa*, commande par un coquin——"

"The *Josefa*?" interrupted I. "Are you quite sure of what you say, monsieur?"

"Oui, oui, monsieur," answered the fellow, "I am quite certaine; I have made no mistake; I know ze *barque* well as I know my own poor leetle *Muette*. I am not likely to make ze mistake when they have rob me of all my ivory and caoutchouc!"

"Very well, sir," responded I; "I will make a bargain with you. Guide us to where you suppose the *Josefa* to be; and should I find her with your assistance, I promise you that you shall have all the ivory and caoutchouc that we may find on board her."

The man clasped his hands rapturously. "Bon, mon cher monsieur; bon!" he exclaimed. "It is ze bargain; it is agreed!"

"Then that is all right," I remarked. "And now, monsieur, having made our bargain, I shall be very pleased if you will do me the honour to remain on board and dine with me; we can then talk over matters a little more in detail, and you can explain to me where the *Josefa* is to be found."

The Frenchman—who, by the way, now introduced himself to me as “Capitan St. Croix”—at once accepted my invitation; having done which, he sent his boat back to the felucca, with instructions to his mate to make sail and keep close in our wake, whereupon we filled upon the schooner and resumed our course to the southward.

By the time that dinner was served in our hot, stuffy little cabin that evening, I had succeeded in extracting from M. St. Croix the information that the *Josefa* would be found concealed in a certain creek of the Congo, which had been so thoroughly fortified as to be practically impregnable. This was bad news; moreover, I found it a little difficult to clearly follow some of St. Croix’ descriptions; but by the time that he left me that night to return to his felucca, I had learned enough to clearly understand that I must depend upon stratagem rather than force for success.

All this threw me into a perfect fever of impatience to get back to the river, which was not lessened when I discovered that the wretched little felucca seemed incapable of doing anything better than five knots under the most favourable conditions that we were likely to meet with on our voyage. I stood it for twenty-four hours, during which we in the schooner jogged along under nothing but a double-reefed mainsail, fore staysail, and jib, in order that we might not run away from our slow-moving consort; and then my impatience so far mastered me that I proposed to St. Croix that he should take up his quarters aboard the *Curlew*—as we had renamed the *Don Cristoval*—and leave the felucca to follow at her leisure. For two whole days the Frenchman obdurately rejected my proposal; but on the third my perseverance triumphed, and late in the afternoon we parted company with the *Muette*, having St. Croix on board the schooner, and with him one of his Krumen—who, he assured me, knew every creek on the river, from Shark Point up to Boma—and a small

canoe, which I understood him to say would be an absolute necessity if we wished for success in our hazardous attempt.

We arrived off the mouth of the river on the following evening, about half-an-hour before sunset, and, nothing being in sight, at once stood in to make the entrance. The sky was overcast, and the night promised to be dark; but this was all in our favour, since the darkness would help to conceal our presence, while the mouth of the river being free from dangers, we could easily feel our way in with the lead.

Fortunately for my impatience, a fresh breeze happened to be blowing from the westward; we therefore crowded sail upon the schooner, and, despite the strong current, fetched up abreast of Shark Point about three bells in the first watch, when we rounded to and came to a single anchor in three fathoms in Diego Bay, just inside the river's mouth.

In accordance with the plans which I had already made, it now became necessary for me to leave the schooner, and to accompany St. Croix on a reconnoitring expedition which I was given to understand would occupy the whole of the next day, and, including the time necessary to return to the schooner, a good part of the succeeding night. I had not made up my mind to this very decisive step without due consideration, for I fully recognised the exceedingly perilous character of the adventure; but I felt convinced, from all St. Croix had told me, that my only hope of success lay in taking the *Josefa* and the slave factory by surprise—so preventing the possibility of the slaves being driven off to a place of safe hiding at the first alarm—and, to accomplish this surprise successfully, it was absolutely necessary that I should make myself fully acquainted, by personal observation, with every feature of the position. Attiring myself, therefore, in an old suit of slops, I embarked, with St. Croix

and his Kruman, in the small canoe, leaving the schooner in charge of young Adams ; when, under the impulse of a small sail, we shoved off and sped rapidly in the darkness up the river.

CHAPTER IV

TRAPPED !

THE Kruman who acted as pilot undoubtedly appeared—as St. Croix had asserted—to know the river thoroughly, for dark as the night was, he evinced no sign whatever of doubt or hesitation. Perched up in the stern of the canoe—which he steered with a short paddle laid out over the quarter—he sat silent and motionless as a bronze image, holding the boat's head straight for some unseen point, and never swerving a hair's-breadth from his course until, at the expiration of about two hours, we suddenly found ourselves entering a tolerably wide creek, only distinguishable as such by the deeper and more palpable darkness that enveloped us as the canoe slid in between its bush-lined banks. We were a taciturn trio, St. Croix having scarcely uttered a word since we shoved off from the schooner ; while as for me, my thoughts were too full of the adventure before me to leave me much inclination for speech.

We navigated this winding creek for about three quarters of an hour, passing several branches on our way, and then, as the Kruman brought the canoe noiselessly alongside a low, gravelly bank, St. Croix leaned forward, and, laying his hand upon mine, remarked in a whisper—

“We land here, mon ami ; the remainder of our journey we must perform on our feet if we desire not our throats to be cut. Tread cautiously, for ze bush it is full of snakes !”

That was a pleasant little item of news, truly, to be told on a dark night while feeling one's way along a bush

path so narrow and so overgrown that the darkness was absolutely a thing *to be felt!* But it was a part of the adventure, so I murmured an acknowledgment of the caution and stepped over the gunwale of the canoe on to the bank, the gravel of which crunched under my feet with alarming loudness in the oppressive silence of the hot, damp night. As I did so, St. Croix said something to the Kruman in a language which I did not understand, and the next instant I received a crashing blow on the head from some hard, heavy instrument, a thousand stars danced before my eyes as I reeled forward under the impact of the stroke, and then I knew no more.

When I recovered consciousness, the first thing of which I became aware was that I was suffering from a splitting headache; the next, that I was again afloat, for I could hear the soft gurgle of water close to my ear on either side; and the next, that it was still as dark as ever. I was occupying a very cramped and uncomfortable position, lying on my right side, or shoulder, rather, with my hands behind me, and my legs doubled up so that my heels seemed to be tucked into the small of my back; but, upon attempting to move, I made the unwelcome discovery that I was lashed hard and fast, hands and heels together. Then, before my bemuddled brain had time to do more than suggest an inquiry as to what had happened, I heard St. Croix' voice.

Thereupon I spoke. "Are you there, St. Croix?" I inquired.

"Ay, I *am* here!" he answered, in a tone curiously suggestive of exultation.

"What has happened?" I next demanded.

"Happened?" he reiterated. "Why, you have simply fallen into ze tr-r-r-ap zat I set for you, scélérat, and are now in my power!"

"Your power?" I repeated. "I don't understand. Pray explain yourself. But, first of all, if you are free

yourself, just cast off these lashings of mine, will you they hurt most abominably!"

"Ha! ha! zhey hurt, do zhey?" he retorted. "Bon! so much ze better-r-r; I am glad! Listen, mon bon capitan! I am not Jules St. Croix at all; I am Jules Lenoir, ze elder brother of ze man you killed when you capture ze *Don Cristoval*, and I am also ze capitan of ze *Josefa*! When I hear zhat my brother vhas kill, I swear zhat I vill have my revanche; and when ve hear zhat you have capture ze *St. Iago* and ze *Mercedes*" (the brigantine) "it vhas agree zhat you make yourself too troublesome, and zhat you must be remove out of our way. So I plan vone leetle plan, and go to sea in ze *Muette* to look for you; and behold! here you are!"

"So!" ejaculated I; "I begin to understand. And, now that you have me, pray what are you going to do with me? Murder me?"

"Non! non!" answered my captor, "I vill not stain my hands vith your dirty blood; I vill make a present of you to my good friend King Plenty. He vill know vhat to do vith you!"

King Plenty! I had heard of him as a most ferocious savage inhabiting a spot on one of the creeks on the southern bank of the river, a potentate who, thanks to his dealings with the slavers, had accumulated a vast store of wealth in the shape of rum, muskets, and ammunition, and who, with the aid of the two latter, had become quite a power among his neighbour kings. Naturally, therefore, the objects of his deepest and most concentrated hatred were those pestilent white men who were making such strenuous efforts to suppress the slave-trade; and it was rumoured that when, at rare intervals, one of these hated beings had the misfortune to fall into his hands, the event was celebrated by a festivity the principal feature of which consisted in putting the captive to death with every refinement of torture that the savage imagina-

tion could devise. And this was the individual into whose power I was to be delivered, bound hand and foot!

And this—a cruel, lingering death at the stake, most probably—was to be the end of all the high hopes and aspirations with which I had entered upon this disastrous adventure! What a fool I had been to allow myself to be so easily trapped, I reflected; and yet when I recalled all that had passed between this villain Lenoir and myself, I could remember no single word or look in the least calculated to arouse my suspicion; the whole plot had been woven with such diabolical skill, the story told had been so cunningly plausible, that, as it seemed to me, no man anxious to do his duty could fail to have been caught by it. Well, I could at least die game; I would not disgrace myself and my cloth by showing fear or pleading for mercy; and, having come to this resolution, I turned a deaf ear to all the revilings, the sneers, and the brutal jocosities to which Lenoir treated me. Then, just as day was breaking, I suddenly became aware of a group of tall trees towering overhead, and the next instant the canoe gently grounded on a sandy beach. Lenoir at once sprang to his feet and shouted something in a language that I did not understand; and presently a great crowd of jabbering savages came swarming round the canoe, and I was lifted out and carried off to a palm-leaf hut, upon the floor of which I was uncereemoniously flung. But in the short interval of my transit from the canoe to the hut I managed to catch a fleeting glimpse of a broad creek, with the *Josefa* and a schooner at anchor on its placid bosom, a native town of probably a hundred and fifty huts, and two immense barracoons standing under the shadow of a clump of enormously tall trees. Lenoir quickly followed me into the hut, to examine my lashings, turning me over uncereemoniously with his foot to do so; when, having satisfied

himself that I was absolutely secure, he walked out again without uttering a word.

I was now left undisturbed for about a couple of hours, during which I strove my utmost to loosen my lashings ; but I might as well have striven to fly, I was bound with new ratline, and it had been drawn so tight and knotted so securely that I was as helpless as though chained.

All this while I was conscious of the sounds of many feet passing to and fro outside the hut, and of a perfect babel of jabbering, excited tongues ; and at length a couple of natives entered the hut and by significant gestures indicated that I was to rise and follow them. But, bound as I was, the thing was impossible ; so after prodding me ineffectually several times with their spears they cut my feet loose, and, seizing me by the arms, half led, half dragged me from the hut.

Once in the open air, I was immediately surrounded by a crowd of laughing, shouting, gesticulating savages, who seemed to be vastly entertained by my helpless appearance—for my limbs had become so completely benumbed by the tightness of my bonds that I had no feeling or strength in them. Thus surrounded, I was dragged for about a quarter of mile to a great open space in the centre of the town, and there securely bound to the trunk of an immense tree, the scorched, blackened, and leafless branches of which told me only too well to what fiendish purpose it was from time to time put. And here for the remainder of that terrible day I was kept bare-headed, exposed to the full blaze of the relentless sun, without either food or drink, while the natives swarmed round me, discussing with great delight and animation what from their looks and gestures I divined to be the subject of my approaching torments.

What my sufferings, mental and physical, were during those few brief hours, language has no words to express ;



“A gang of some fifty negroes appeared.”

but you may guess something of what it was when I tell you that at last I actually *longed* for death to come to my relief, although I was well aware that the death for which I longed was to be one of fiery torment !

At length, when the sun had declined to within about two hours of his setting, a gang of some fifty negroes appeared, each bearing either a heavy log or a large bundle of brushwood upon his shoulder, which they forthwith began to arrange in a wide circle round the tree to which I was bound. These fellows were speedily followed by others similarly burdened, so that within half-an-hour I was hemmed in by a compact wall of logs and brushwood standing about breast-high. I needed no explanation of these sinister preparations ; but, that I might be left in no possible doubt, Lenoir made his appearance outside the barrier, over which he shouted the intelligence that some time that night it would be fired, and, when well ablaze, would be gradually pushed forward, so that I might be slowly roasted to death !

The heat that afternoon was positively frightful, for the wind died away to a breathless calm, and while the savages were building my funeral pyre, I noticed the upper edge of a great bank of purple-grey cloud soaring gradually into the western heavens, and spreading as it soared, the sure precursor of one of those terrific thunder-storms to which the Congo district is subject at certain periods of the year ; so that, as I reflected dismally, I was likely to go to my fiery doom in a sufficiently picturesque and dramatic manner. When the sun at length plunged behind this livid curtain, the latter had spread in a crescent shape until a full quarter of the firmament was obscured, and I observed that it was rising and spreading with great rapidity.

The darkness gathered early that night, and as it did so the savages provided themselves with torches, gathering in such vast numbers round the circle of combustibles

that hemmed me in that it soon became almost as light as day again, although not so light but that I could detect through the yellow, smoky glare the flickering lightnings wherewith the coming storm heralded its approach.

By-and-by the slow, measured beat of a tom-tom became audible through the noisy chattering of the vast crowd that had gathered about me, and immediately the excited jabbering subsided into an almost breathless silence. Then another tom-tom joined in, and another, and another, until there must have been a full dozen of them going, the beating becoming momentarily more rapid, until my throbbing brain fairly reeled with the giddy sounds, above which the low, sullen rumble of distant thunder now made itself heard. Presently I became aware, by the increasing loudness of the savage music, that the tom-tom beaters were approaching, and two or three minutes later they wheeled into the open space in front of me, and squatted down upon their haunches, with their tom-toms—now being most furiously beaten—between their knees. They were followed by about a hundred men fully armed with spear and shield, in the midst of which, borne aloft on a sort of rude throne supported upon the shoulders of eight stalwart negroes, sat an enormously fat man, black as ebony, naked save for a leopard skin apron about his loins, armed with some half-dozen long, broad-bladed, cruel-looking spears. This potentate, whom I rightly surmised to be King Plenty, halted his bearers square in front of me, scrutinised me curiously, and with a savage leer of delight upon his bloated features, for fully ten minutes. Then he made a sign by raising his right hand in the air, and on the instant some thirty or forty savages sprang forward with a shout and thrust their blazing torches into the heart of the combustibles by which I was surrounded.

“Thank God,” thought I, “it will soon be over now!” and I only regretted that there was no wind to blow the

smoke my way and suffocate me out of my misery. But the air was breathless, and the brown wreaths of pungent smoke went curling straight upward to the black heavens in an unbroken circle.

Meanwhile the storm was gathering apace; the lightning was rapidly becoming more vivid and frequent; the thunder louder, deeper, and nearer every moment; and I



“Borne aloft on a sort of rude throne supported upon the shoulders of eight stalwart negroes.”

remember wondering whether the fire, when fully ignited, would have power enough to withstand the pelting torrents of rain that would by-and-by come, and whether I should be still alive to feel its refreshing coolness.

But, rapidly as grew the storm, the fire grew more rapidly—for the savages had been careful to collect only thoroughly dry wood—and within ten minutes of its

ignition the zone of flame which encircled me had become a roaring furnace, giving out an amount of heat that was already scarcely endurable, while fresh supplies of wood were being thrown upon the blazing pile, and the savages were pushing it slowly inward toward me with long poles.

Another ten minutes and I could tell by the smell that my clothing was scorching on my body, while the skin of my face and hands began to blister here and there under the influence of the fierce heat that now played upon me, and the air that I breathed burnt my nostrils like flame. The tom-toms were still being furiously beaten, the lightning was flashing and quivering continuously athwart the black heavens, and the thunder was booming overhead like the salvoes of artillery from hostile fleets in close action, but I was only dimly conscious of it all. I had attention for but one thing—the fierce, intolerable heat that played about me, searing my eyeballs, and leaping toward me in long, crackling tongues of roaring flame that momentarily threatened to envelop me as a garment.

I was tottering upon the very verge of insensibility—or was it death?—when I was aroused by the splashing of a few heavy drops of delicious coolness upon my upturned, blistering face; another breathless moment, during which a terrific flash of sun-bright lightning clove the darkness and dimmed even the fierce light of the flames that encompassed me, and down came the rain in true tropical style, a perfect cascade of sweet, tepid water that in an instant drenched me to the skin, and revived me as though the shower had been the very elixir of life. I opened my mouth and allowed the blessed drops to fall upon my cracked lips and parched tongue; and so great was the refreshment of them that I actually forgot the fire that roared and crackled and hissed about me! In a moment I found myself enveloped in a dense cloud of steam, through which the leaping flames flickered and

dwindled, growing less and less, until, almost before I had time to realise what was happening, the fire was extinguished, and I found myself plunged in darkness and silence, save for the frequent glare of the lightning, and the almost continuous crash of the thunder. The storm having extinguished the fire, the natives had beaten a hasty retreat to their huts, leaving me to the tender mercies of the elements. A few minutes later, however—by which time the storm was raging furiously, thunder and lightning, wind and rain, seeming to be striving together in one tremendous effort of destruction—Lenoir, wet to the skin, and with the rain literally streaming off him, suddenly appeared beside me, and in another moment I felt him trying my lashings. Apparently they were secure enough to satisfy him, for presently he came round in front of me, and, watching me by the continuous flickering glare of the lightning, remarked—

“So ho, mon ami, how do you like dis after your roasting? Quite cool and refreshing, eh? Ah, but perhaps it is *too* cool! Vell, nevaire mind, mon cher, it vill not last long; ze sun vill rise again to-morrow and warm you, and to-morrow night ze good King Plenty he vill light anoder fire for you! You vill not mind staying here all night, eh? No, of course not. But I—I am afraid of ze fevaire, so I vill go aboard, dry myself, and turn in; because, you see, dere is a big cargo of esclaves coming down for me to-morrow, and aftaire I have shipped dem I vill only stay to see ze last of you, and den I vill be off. Bon soir, mon cher! A pleasant night and happy dreams I vish you!”

And, so saying, he bowed ironically, and disappeared in the darkness.

I was, however, not destined to endure the sufferings to which this scoundrel so exultingly looked forward; for scarcely had he disappeared when I became aware of the presence of another visitor. I suddenly felt that some one

was manipulating the lashings that Lenoir had so carefully scrutinised a few minutes previously, and presently, to my inexpressible surprise and delight, I discovered that I was free. At the same moment a small, soft hand grasped mine, and gently drew me round to the other side of the tree, where I found myself confronted by a young native girl, who promptly intimated the necessity for caution by placing her finger on her lips. We waited where we were for a few seconds, until an unusually vivid flash of lightning rendered the whole scene as bright as day, and then, in the opaque darkness that followed, I felt myself being led swiftly out of the circle of half-burnt logs into the concealing shadows of a dense clump of bush that grew at no great distance. Here we paused again for a few brief seconds, taking advantage of the short and uncertain intervals of darkness that followed the lightning flashes to flit from clump to clump of bush, until in a few minutes we found ourselves deep in the heart of the bush, secure from discovery by prying eyes, and moving rapidly along a bush path that I presently discovered was winding round toward the river. Ten minutes later we emerged upon a small strip of sandy beach occupying the angle of a bend of the creek, about a hundred yards or so above the spot where I must have been landed, for *below* me I just caught sight indistinctly of the *Josefa* and the schooner, riding dark and silent on the rain-lashed bosom of the creek. There were a dozen or more canoes, of different sizes, drawn up on this strip of beach, and, selecting the smallest of them, my companion slid it gently into the water. Then motioning me to enter, she placed a paddle in my hand, pointed *up* the creek, and with a vigorous push sent the canoe surging a dozen yards toward mid-channel, motioning me to paddle hard. I lost no time in obeying her behest, paddling first on one side and then on the other, and managing the canoe with little or no difficulty. As soon as my deliverer saw that I was all



“ She waved her hand above her head by way of farewell.”

right, she waved her hand above her head by way of farewell, and at once disappeared into the bush again.

I was by this time chilled to the marrow with the drenching to which I had been exposed, and so stiff from being tightly lashed for so many hours that I could scarcely move, while I was still dazed at my sudden and unexpected deliverance from a cruel death ; nevertheless I had sense enough to understand that my situation was still one of the utmost peril, out of which I must extricate myself without loss of time, so I paddled away with all the vigour I could muster, and presently had the satisfaction of shutting in the *Josefa* and her consort round the bend of the creek, without the occurrence of anything to indicate that my escape had been discovered. The exertion of paddling soon restored my circulation, and I made fairly rapid way down the creek, observing, by the glare of the lightning, that the waterway broadened rapidly as I went. I kept on thus for about twenty minutes, and then, to my great joy, discovered that I was nearing some very considerable expanse of water, which a few minutes of further paddling convinced me must be nothing less than the main stream of the Congo, into which I presently shot. But at the junction of the creek with the main stream I sheered the canoe in alongside the bank, and, holding on by the branches of an overhanging bush, securely lashed my pocket-handkerchief to a bough in such a manner that it could readily be seen at some considerable distance. Then I shoved off again and turned the canoe's head down stream.

The wind was blowing more than half a gale by this time, but it was fortunately from the southward, so that by hugging the southern bank pretty closely I was fairly well sheltered ; and fortunate was it for me that it was so, for at the distance of a quarter of a mile from the bank the whole surface of the river was a boiling caldron of breaking seas, that would have swamped the canoe in five

minutes. I managed fairly well, however, venturing as far out as I dared, so as to secure the utmost benefit possible from the strong downward current; and so well did this befriended me that in little more than an hour and a half I sighted the *Curlew* riding at anchor where I had left her; and in another ten minutes I once more stood on her deck, free and *safe*!

Late as was the hour, I found everybody wide awake and on the look-out aboard the schooner, with young Adams, clad from head to heel in oilskins, anxiously pacing the deck—for, although I was by no means overdue, he informed me that he was already growing extremely anxious as to my safety—and it was pleasant, indeed, to observe the air of relief that seemed to pervade the ship upon the discovery that I had returned safe, and apparently not much the worse for wear. I quickly told my story, and, ere I had well finished it, all hands were on deck, and, without waiting for orders, were busying themselves in getting the schooner under way; and from a few muttered remarks that I overheard I gathered that the men had made up their minds to visit with dire retribution the treachery that had involved me in such deadly peril and suffering. Adams—spirited lad that he was—implored me to go below and turn in, pledging himself faithfully that not one of the slavers should escape him; but, of course, that was not to be thought of for a moment, so I contented myself with a change of clothing and a fairly hearty meal off the viands that the steward had immediately produced, and then returned on deck to take charge.

By the time that I was once more in the open air the schooner was under way and foaming up the river under all the canvas she dared show to the piping breeze. The rain had ceased, the storm had swept across the river and was now flashing and muttering intermittently some seven or eight miles away, and a few stars were peeping out

here and there overhead and to the southward. It took the schooner but half-an-hour to traverse, against the current, the distance that I had taken three times as long to cover in the canoe, and I had not been on deck many minutes when a hail came from the forecastle of—

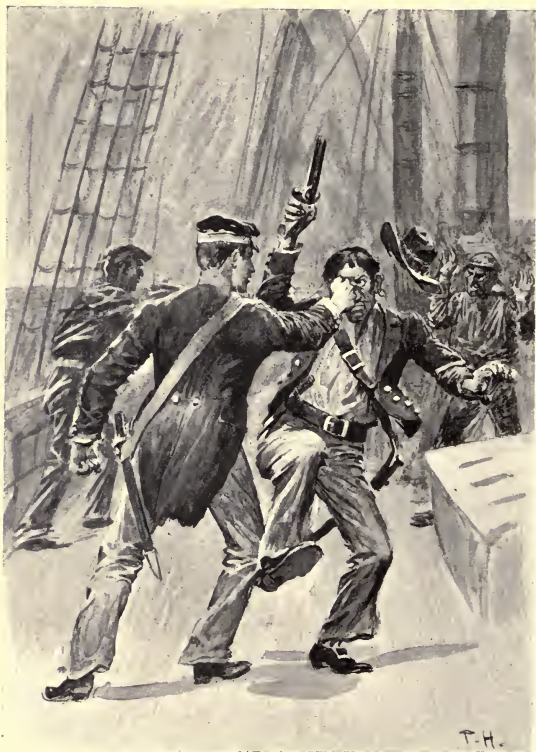
“There’s somethin’ white flutterin’ from a bough in-shore there on our starboard bow! Is that your handkercher, sir?”

“Likely enough,” I answered, peering over the rail at the dark shadow to windward. “Can you see anything like the opening of a creek near it?”

“Yes, sir,” came the answer; “there’s a blackness just to the east’ard of it that looks like a break in the bushes.”

“Then that will be it,” I remarked to young Adams. “Ay, I can see the handkerchief now—there it is! Clew up and furl your topsail, Mr. Adams, and settle away the peak and throat of your boom foresail. Ready about!”

The men sprang to their stations; the topsail and foresail were taken in; the schooner was hove round on the port tack, and two or three minutes later we were gliding up the creek under mainsail and jib, with the wind scuffling wildly overhead among the bush and trees that bordered the creek on either hand. Once fairly within the creek, I ordered the remainder of our canvas to be taken in, feeling assured that the schooner would hold her way long enough to carry us alongside the *Josefa*; and, this done, the men, with drawn cutlasses, stood by to heave the grappling-irons and board, my hope being that I should take both craft by surprise. But as we rounded the bend in the creek which brought us within sight of our quarry, a low hum and clamour of voices became audible, and a glare of torches shone through the bushes from the shore; moreover, the creek was full of canoes paddling excitedly hither and thither. Unless I was greatly mistaken, my escape had been discovered, and the savages were all out in pursuit of me.



"Before he could pull the trigger I had struck up the weapon."

A great shout went up from the occupants of the canoes as the schooner glided round the bend, and there was an instant and general retreat toward the shore.

There was also a sudden shouting and confusion aboard the barque and the schooner ; but before anything could be done we were alongside and fast to the *Josefa*, with our lads pouring over her rail after me. The first individual I encountered was Lenoir, who was raving at his crew like a madman in an unavailing effort to rally them. Upon seeing me he snatched a pistol from his belt and levelled it at my head, but before he could pull the trigger I had struck up the weapon, and the next instant he crashed to the deck, struck senseless by a blow fair between the eyes which I let him have with all the energy and good-will of which I was capable. That settled the matter so far as the *Josefa* was concerned, for her crew, taken by surprise, could do nothing against our people, they simply retreated to their forecastle and were there promptly battened down. Nor did the schooner fare any better, for although her people cut her cables and tried to get the canvas on her, young Adams—who with a few men remained by my orders on board the *Curlew* to take care of her—at once opened fire with his larboard broadside with such effect that her people were compelled to run her ashore to save her from sinking under them. They made good their escape into the forest, but we set fire to the schooner and burned her to the water's edge. As for King Plenty and his people, they evacuated their town at the first sound of the firing ; but as soon as I had secured the *Josefa's* people I landed with a party of bluejackets, and we burned the slave barracoons and the King's "palace"—a collection of some thirty huts surrounded by a strong palisade. I felt sorely tempted to destroy the entire town, but refrained for the sake of the girl who had taken compassion upon my helplessness and set me free.

Five days later we arrived at Sierra Leone with the *Josefa* in company, and in due course the latter was condemned and her crew committed for trial. But I knew nothing of it, having succumbed to a sharp attack of

fever within a few hours of clearing the Congo ; and when I regained my senses it was to find myself in hospital, weak as a new-born babe, but high in favour with everybody for what they were pleased to term my "dashing exploit," and with my commission as commander in my pocket. Lenoir and nine of his companions were subsequently hanged for piracy and murder upon the high seas upon evidence of the most convincing character.

ON A MEXICAN RANCHE

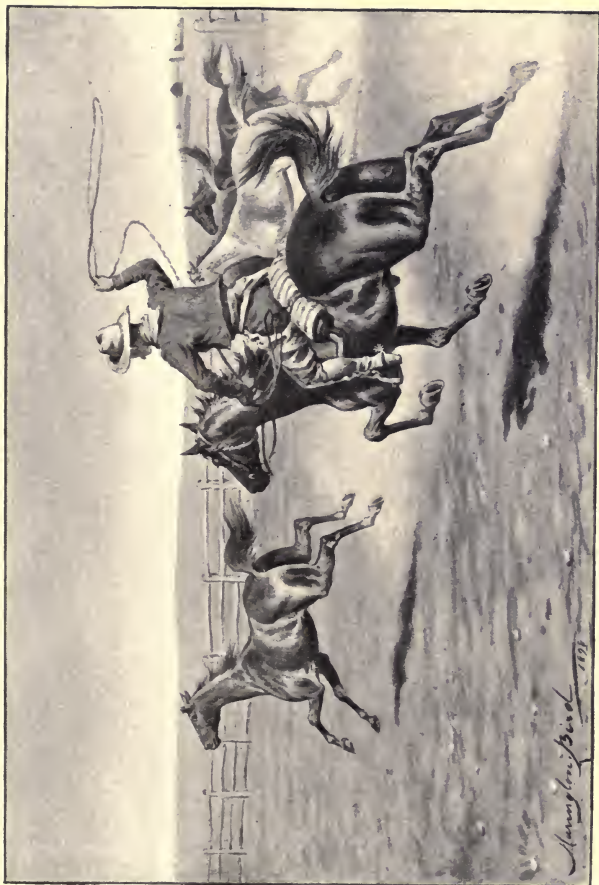
By G. A. HENTY

THERE were few wider estates in Texas than that of Don Garcia Novales. It lay on the western frontier, and indeed nearly half of it lay on the Mexican side of the frontier line. Thousands of horses and tens of thousands of cattle ranged over its broad expanse. It is true that, with few exceptions, the whole of these animals were almost, if not quite wild. That was indeed rather an advantage, as they gave but little trouble to their owners till the time came when they were wanted for the market. Ten years before they were almost valueless, for there were no purchasers; but with the severance of Texas from Mexico a great change had taken place. American enterprise was changing the whole state of things. Capitalists were taking up great tracts of hitherto almost useless land, purchasing the titles for a trifle from the Mexican owners, and stocking them with cattle which they purchased from great ranches like that of Don Garcia Novales.

Speculators bought herds to drive east into the border States, breaking them up and disposing of them by scores or hundreds to settlers there. The animals, therefore, which had hitherto been so valueless that they had scarcely been reckoned as one of the sources of income of their owner, now became an important item in his possessions. Don Garcia himself would gladly have dispensed with the addition. Like most of his countrymen, he hated the men who had disturbed the sleepy tranquillity of life in Texas. His income from his tobacco plantations, his mines in

Mexico, the hides, and his cotton-fields, was larger than sufficed for his needs. His table was supplied from the estates. Horses, when required, could be lassoed, brought in, and broken in in any numbers. Indian corn, rice, sugar, the chief items of food of the slaves, were all raised on the estates, while meat was forthcoming to any amount. Save for dresses and jewels for his daughter, and a few imported luxuries, such as wine, the calls upon his purse were insignificant.

The changes, then, that went on were a source of almost unmixed annoyance: there were complaints from his herdsmen, of cattle being driven off by parties of reckless whites; disputes arose with the cowboys of an American company which had purchased a large tract of land to the north, and more than one fray had taken place between his peons and their men, owing to the cattle of one or other party straying beyond their limits and getting mixed with those of their neighbour. He had, so far refused to resort to the method adopted by many other Mexican proprietors, of engaging several white overlookers and cowboys. These were paid but a small salary, but were given a fixed proportion—a third or a fourth—of the increase of the herds they looked after. It was therefore to their interest to guard them closely, and to protect them both from cattle-stealers and from the cowboys of other ranches. It was found that much trouble was saved by this method, and quarrels avoided with their unwelcome neighbours, while the profits were larger than those made when matters were looked after by the indolent natives. Don Garcia had for some time refused to adopt this method; but he hated trouble, and there were such constant complaints of theft from his herds that he began to feel that it would be necessary to adopt the practice, at any rate on the northern part of his estates. He had now, with his daughter, been paying a visit to a friend whose estate lay eighty miles to the south.



“Horses, when required, could be lassoed.”

The trip had its business side. Don Ramon de Vaga had a son, and the two fathers had agreed that an alliance between their houses would be a desirable matter.

Some months before, Don Ramon and his son Don Pedro had paid a visit to the ranche of Don Garcia, but the result had not been altogether satisfactory. Pedro, a hot-headed young fellow who had never been thwarted in a single wish, had indeed been greatly struck with Isabella Novales. But the young señora had by no means been favourably impressed with him; his temper was an ungovernable one, and the violence with which on two or three occasions he treated his grooms for some trifling act of disobedience or forgetfulness, had excited her indignation and disgust. In her home, slaves were kindly treated; her father was of easy temper; he was proud of his race, which was of the purest Spanish, without the admixture of a single drop of Indian blood, and very proud of his daughter. He would have resented any slight upon the part of his equals; but so that everything went on with its usual regularity at the hacienda, he was content, and left its entire management to his major-domo, Sancho Valdez, in whom he had implicit confidence.

The return visit was intended to undo the bad effect of the first. Don Ramon had assured his friend that he had spoken very strongly to his son, and pointed out to him that unless he put some restraint on himself, there was no probability that the match on which he had already set his mind would come off. Their visit, however, had not been altogether a success. Don Pedro had been most attentive to Isabella, and had studiously kept his temper in check; but the girl saw plainly enough that the slaves were all in the greatest fear of him, and that they shrunk as if expecting a blow when he addressed them.

"It is no use, father," she said one day before the termination of the visit, when she was alone with Don Garcia, "for you to promise my hand to Don Pedro;

nothing could induce me to marry him. I would rather a thousand times enter a convent, though I have always thought that anything would be better than a life between four walls, brought up as I have been, to mount my horse and gallop across the country as I choose ; but even that would be preferable to a life with Don Pedro. He is handsome and can be agreeable, but he is a tyrant among his own people, and I should be most wretched ; and I am convinced that the idea had better be altogether abandoned."

Isabella was now between fourteen and fifteen, an age at which girls are not unfrequently married in Mexico, where they reach maturity some years younger than among Northern people. She was strikingly pretty, even for one of her race and age, and bade fair to be a beautiful woman in another year or two. She had lost her mother when she was but a year old, and had been the constant companion of her father from the time when she had learnt to sit on a quiet pony. By the time she was ten she could ride any broken horse on the estate, and was absolutely fearless in the saddle. Thus, while her figure retained the grace so general among the women of her race, her life in the open air had given it a firmness and vigour rare among them. She was a good shot with the rifle, and was often away on horseback with her dogs from early morning until dusk, when she would return with her game slung from the saddle behind her.

Her position as the young mistress of the hacienda, within whose wide limits she reigned as a little queen, and her close intercourse with her father, had given her a certain decision and firmness in strong contrast to the languor and love of careless ease of Mexican girls. She was acquainted with every man on the estate, and was so thoroughly acquainted with its working, that her father frequently consulted her as to any changes he proposed making in the arrangements ; and when she affirmed, with

even more than her usual decision, that nothing could induce her to marry Don Pedro de Vaga, her father acquiesced in her decision, saying—

“Well, Isabella, if that is so, there is an end of the matter. I own that I am not myself altogether pleased with the young man. When I gave my word to his father that he should marry you, it was some years ago, and it appeared a very suitable match in all respects; but



“Was often away on horseback with her dogs.”

I guarded myself by saying that ‘while I agree most heartily, Don Ramon, to your proposal, and will do all in my power to bring the match about, I say fairly that I have made up my mind that when the child comes to an age to know her own mind, I shall in no way force her inclination. My estates now are larger than one man can well manage, and it is not to increase them that I would marry my daughter to your son, but because you and I are old friends, and that I would gladly see our families

united by a closer bond ; therefore, while I will in every way further your son's suit, I will put no force upon her should she in time, though I have little fear of such a thing happening, feel repugnance to the match.' "

"Thank you, father. I am sorry indeed that in this case I cannot do as you would wish me, but Don Pedro is absolutely hateful to me ; he is a tyrant, and I would rather pass my life as the poorest peon on the estate than trust myself to him. I believe him to be capable of anything, and the very thought of a life spent with him frightens me."

"Well, we will say no more about it, dear. I have already told Don Ramon that I feared it could never be, but I am sorry to say that my old friend would not take the refusal as final, and insisted that it was but a girlish freak on your part, and that in time you would come to look at matters more sensibly."

"Well, father, he will get the same answer whenever he comes, and the more seldom he comes the better I shall be pleased ; but if he came once a month until I am a hundred, his answer would be always the same."

"At any rate, Isabel, we must receive him hospitably when he comes. I could not all at once explain the full extent of your dislike of the match to Don Ramon, and though I said that I did not think that you would alter your mind, I told him that at any rate his son would be welcome when he came, and if as time went on you should look more favourably on his suit, that matters could go on as we proposed. An abrupt statement of your views would have led to an estrangement between the families, which would be very painful to me, and I should be sorry indeed to have a quarrel with my old friend. In time I will write to him and tell him that your resolve is immovable."

Don Garcia and his daughter started on their return journey in the family carriage drawn by six mules. Isabella's maid sat on the box with the driver, and four well-

armed servants rode beside it. On the second day of the journey, as they were passing through a wood in a narrow valley, a shot was fired, and one of the servants fell from his horse ; it was followed by a scattered discharge, and six men sprang out from the trees. Another of the servants was shot, the other two were pulled from their horses, while a man climbing on to the box with a pistol in his hand compelled the driver to alight and lie down in the road. The Spaniard and his daughter were then ordered to alight. As the former's pistols were unloaded, he was forced to obey, and was in the act of handing Isabella out when the sound of a horse's tread at full gallop was heard, and a moment later a young man dashed up. He was armed with a revolver, at that time a novel weapon ; the pistol cracked twice, and two of the Mexicans fell, both shot through the head. Their companions with loud imprecations rushed at him, discharging their pistols and drawing their knives. He shifted the revolver to his left hand, and two more of the Mexicans fell, while the others with a shout of terror plunged into the wood.

"You had better loose your servants, señor," the young man said quietly. "I don't think the fellows will return ; but it is as well to be prepared for them, and just at present I am not up to further fighting."

The Don at once released the two servants, and angrily commanded the maid, who had been screaming loudly from the moment the first shot was fired, to be silent ; gave the coachman a kick and told him to rise, and then turned to thank their rescuer. He had dismounted and was leaning against his horse, and Isabella was eagerly inquiring as to his injury.

"Do not alarm yourself, señora," he replied, "it is of no consequence. My right arm is broken by a pistol bullet, and I have got another somewhere near my hip, I think ; but do not trouble about me. I know some

people a few miles away, and shall manage to get there somehow."

"I cannot think of such a thing, señor," Don Garcia said; "you have most nobly saved us from a great peril, and I cannot dream of leaving you here. You take your place in the carriage again, Isabella. I will see to this gentleman's wounds; I have had some experience that way, as you know."

The arm was broken a short distance above the elbow. By Don Garcia's direction the coachman cut a strip of bark a foot long from a tree some four inches in diameter. The wound was first carefully bandaged, and then laid in the case of bark, which was tightly wound round it; a similar piece of bark was used as a sling to the forearm. To the other wound, which was an inch or two in front of the hip, nothing could be done save applying a bandage to stop the bleeding, which was, however, but slight.

"Now, señor," he said, "you must let us place you in my coach. I am Don Garcia de Novales; my hacienda is three days' journey, but by pressing the mules we will get there by to-morrow night, then you will have every care and attention, and I will send off one of my servants to-morrow morning, so that he may get a surgeon there by the time we arrive. The journey is a long one, but I think that you will do well to come with us; you certainly cannot sit your horse, and can hardly be so well attended to in any place about here."

The young man murmured something about not liking to give trouble, but he was too faint to offer anything like a vigorous protest. Isabella was called out of the carriage, two pieces of wood were laid between the seats, and on these one of the cushions was placed, so that he could rest, and indeed lie down, for the carriage was a large one. While the Spaniard had been dressing the wound, the two servants had dug a shallow grave by the roadside, and in this they placed the bodies of their dead

comrades and covered them with earth. They now assisted Don Garcia and the coachman to lift the young man into the coach, where he was laid in a reclining position, with blankets and rugs under his head and shoulders. The Spaniard took his place beside him, and Isabella occupied the remaining seat. The servants then mounted.

"We shall not stop where we intended," Don Garcia said to the coachman, "we must get home to-morrow evening. We had best stop for the night at San Lorenzo, we can find accommodation at the priest's there. Be careful how you drive; you must go fast, but avoid all stones and rough places."

The young man who had so opportunely come to their rescue was apparently scarce twenty years old, and though bronzed to a deep brown by the sun, his hair showed that his complexion was naturally fair. He was attired in a coloured flannel shirt, Mexican trousers with fringed sides, and high riding-boots. On his head he wore one of the thick stiff hats with wide brim, encircled with a scarlet and gold cord, in use alike by the cowboys and Mexican vaqueros. Isabella filled a cup with water and acidulated juice of fruit from a bottle hanging from the roof of the carriage, and handed it to her father, who held it to the young man's lips. He drank it eagerly.

"I am ashamed to be of so much trouble," he said faintly.

"Why should you be ashamed?" Don Garcia asked heartily; "you have rendered us an invaluable service. Doubtless they would have put us to a very heavy ransom, if worse had not befallen us. You are an American, I presume?"

"No, I am English, señor; my name is Harry Denham; but I have been knocking about this country for the last five years, sometimes working on a ranche, sometimes hunting. I have been staying for the last few days with a vaquero and his family. I was just starting north to

look for work, as I could hear of none here, and as I came down upon the road I saw your coach ahead of me. I was a quarter of a mile behind when I heard some shots fired, and thinking that I might be of some use, I rode on at full speed, and of course did what I could."

He was speaking very faintly now, and Don Garcia said, "We will talk it all over later on; at present it would be best if you could doze off to sleep."

Harry Denham, although still little more than a lad, had led a life of adventure for the past five years. He was but fourteen when his father, a consulting physician, died suddenly. Harry had been a year at Rugby, and would have returned to school in the course of a few days, when his father's death deranged everything. His mother had died some years before, and his brother Tom, who had now been a year at Cambridge, was his only near relative. The day after the funeral Tom returned from a visit to the office of his father's trustee, with whom he had had a long talk.

"What day do you think I had better go down to school, Tom?"

"Well, Harry, I am sorry to say that I think there is very little chance of your going back at all, or of my returning to Cambridge."

Harry opened his eyes in surprise—"Why not?"

"Well, because as far as I can see at present we are in a hole altogether. Mr. Ellerman has been telling me that, so far as he knows, there is really no property whatever. You see father had for years very uphill work. When ten years ago he moved into Harley Street, and set up as a consulting physician, he thought that, having made his mark as one of the staff of Guy's, and having a good private connection, he could soon obtain a practice. However, for the first three or four years it came in but slowly. Of course his expenses were heavy with this house and his carriage and all that sort of thing, and he had to

borrow money. Things got better, and gradually he paid, I believe, most of this loan off. Still, he saw his way and was able to send me to Harrow. Then, of course, you have been for the last four years at an expensive school, preparing for Rugby, and everything was going on well till eighteen months ago he fell ill, as you know, and had to go away to the south of France for four months. That, of course, meant not only a heavy expense, but the loss of practice.

“He told me something about it before I went up last year, and, of course, I said at once that I would give up going to the 'Varsity, and would go in for the army or anything else he liked. I said that I would enlist for a year or two, and then, if things went on all right, he could buy me a commission—anyhow I did not want to be an expense to him; but he said, ‘There is no occasion for that, Tom, things will soon improve again; I have no doubt that in a few months I shall be straight again.’ Well, he was right, as far as the practice was concerned. I spoke to him about it when I came down last, and he said that he was now doing better again, and that there was no occasion for him to make any alteration in his plans for me or for you, and that in the course of a few months he expected that he should be a free man again, and could calculate upon making a clear £2000 a year.

“Well, you see, Harry, he did not have more than two months, and the result is that I was not surprised to-day, on talking the matter over with Mr. Ellerman, to hear that, although the loan he had obtained on his furniture is partly paid off, there is practically nothing left but the balance of what the furniture and the horses and carriage will fetch. Of course there are bills to be paid, and one thing and another, and I fancy that a couple of hundred pounds is about all that we shall have between us. The question is, What is to be done? It has not come quite as a surprise to me. For the last year, you see, I have

known that everything depended on his health, and though I never thought of this, I did think that he might be obliged, as he was before, to give up practice again and go away to a warm climate, and I made up my mind that if he did so I would go out to America and rough it there.

"I spoke to Mr. Ellerman about it to-day—he was father's solicitor as well as trustee, you know—and he says that he thinks that it is about the best thing that I could do, and that a client of his has a large ranche down in Texas, and that he is sure that if he speaks to him about it he will give me an introduction to his agent, and that he will put me on to some work. That is all straight-forward enough. The question is, What is to be done with you?"

"Why cannot you take me out with you, Tom? I could do something, you know—I don't know what, but I suppose a boy is worth something out there, just as he is here; at any rate, I might earn my food, and not be much bother to you. Even if there were money to keep me at school, I would a thousand times rather do that than be here all by myself. Besides, I could not go to a good school, and I should hate to go to some beastly little place after being at Rugby. Besides, what could I do when I left school?—get a place in an office? I would a thousand times rather go out with you if you will take me."

"Well, you are a little beggar for that sort of thing, Harry," his brother said, looking at him as if estimating his strength.

"I am not little at all for my age, Tom; and I could thrash any fellow in my form at Rugby, anyhow."

"Well, I must think it over," Tom said. "Of course I should like to have you with me; as you say, you might be able to earn your grub, and anyhow that cannot cost much out there, and I dare say there will be something

left after paying our passage out ; but it will be rough work for you, you know—precious hard work.”

“Well, it will be much pleasanter work, at any rate, Tom, than grinding away at Greek and algebra.”

Tom did think it over, and the result was that after a consultation with Mr. Ellerman he told Harry that he would take him with him. Their trustee had fallen in with the idea at once. He was a man with a large family of his own, and the problem what to do with Harry had been on his mind ever since his client's death, and this solution of the difficulty was very welcome to him. Two months later Tom and his brother arrived at the ranche in Texas. Tom was at once attached to one of the parties of cowboys, and Harry was kept at the home station, and was to make himself generally useful in aiding the men in looking after the horses and herds maintained there.

It was not long before he learnt to sit the most vicious *broncho*, and to throw a lasso fairly ; then he was sent out as boy with one of the outfits. Here his duties were to look after the bunches of cowboy horses. He was earning wages now, whereas at the home station he had only got his grub ; and when not engaged with the horses, he practised continually with his revolver—the greatest ambition of all the boys out on the plains being to become first-rate pistol shots.

Six months later he received the sudden news that his brother Tom had been shot by one of the other cowboys in his outfit, a man who was notorious as one of the best shots there, and who in a quarrel had shot Tom down before the latter could even lay his hand on his pistol. This was a terrible blow to Harry, who had only seen his brother a few times since they came out, and who had hoped ere long that he should be posted to the same outfit with him. He learned that the deed had aroused such indignation among the other cowboys that Jake Swindon had been obliged to leave the ranche.

Had the occurrence been altogether opposed to the rules governing the conduct of the cowboys in such matters, he would have been shot down at once; but there had been a serious quarrel, and according to their notions Tom should have been ready to draw when his companion did so; still, it was felt that as dealing with a young hand who had never been engaged in such an affair before, Jake had not given him a fair chance.

Tom's belongings were handed over to Harry. For the next three years Harry practised assiduously with his revolver, and at the end of that time was acknowledged as being the best shot in his outfit. He was now regarded as no longer a boy, but took his place as a cowboy; he was now nineteen, and the life he had led had hardened and strengthened him exceedingly; he stood five feet ten, he was lithe and sinewy, and the muscles of his arms and shoulders stood up in cords through his clear skin.

It now came to his knowledge that Jake was at work in an adjoining ranche, and taking two of his comrades with him, he rode over there. As usual, they were at once, on their arrival, invited to sit down and join the others at supper.

"I cannot do that," Harry said, "until I have settled accounts with one Jake Swindon."

A figure sprang at once to his feet with his hand behind him, but already Harry's pistol was levelled at his head.

"Hands up," he shouted. "Now," he went on, "I am not going to murder you in cold blood, as you murdered my brother, Tom Denham; I am going to give you a fair chance—more than a skunk like you deserves. Now, Dick, do you take thirty paces; we will be placed that distance apart, with our backs to each other, and when the word is given we will shoot as we like. That is fair, isn't it, boys?"

There was a murmur of assent.

"Very well. Now my two mates will walk with that

fellow to his mark, I would not trust him not to shoot directly my back is turned. Two of you can walk with me if you like ; but as I have not shot him now when I could do so face to face, I am not likely to do so when his back is turned. Now I want two others of you to stand close to us, pistol in hand, till the word is given, and if either of us moves before that, shoot him down. I want a third to give the signal ; when you say one, the men standing by will draw back, and the two with pistols will level them at us ; at the word three we turn round and can fire as we like. No one can say that I have not given this fellow a fair chance."

"No ; that is fair enough," the other cowboys agreed, all greatly interested in this arrangement for a duel of a kind quite unknown to them, as in cowboy disputes the custom is for each to draw at once and fire as quickly as he can. Jake was led off, livid with rage. As a matter of formality, two of Jake's companions walked with Harry to the firing point, and two others drawing their colts, placed themselves a couple of yards from the combatants. There was a dead stillness for a moment, and then a voice asked, "Are you ready ? One," and the four men standing by the combatants stepped back ; "Two," and then after a pause, "Three."

As if moved by a spring, Harry and his opponent faced round. Both were confident in their skill, and neither held their fire a moment. Two shots rang out as one. Harry felt as if a hot iron had passed along his cheek. Jake's passion at being thus bearded by a mere lad had slightly unsteadied his hand, while Harry's arm was as steady as if carved in marble. Jake fell back with a bullet in the centre of his forehead. Even among the man's comrades there was no feeling of regret at his death ; he was disliked and feared among them ; he had in the course of his career killed a dozen men, and the retribution that had fallen upon him was felt to be richly deserved.

A [week] later Harry rode in to headquarters, and told the manager that he had better send another man out to take his place, for that he wanted a change for a bit, and intended to go shooting. He drew the hundred pounds remaining after paying their expenses out, and which Tom had deposited in the manager's care, and paying for the horse that he had ridden in, which was the best of those he had used at his work, he rode to the nearest town, some sixty miles away, bought a rifle and a large store of ammunition, some tea, sugar, and flour, and started out again for the plains. Here for six months he hunted game, taking the skins in for sale occasionally to the towns, paying his expenses and enjoying the life. Then he rode down south in search of employment on one of the Mexican ranches, but failing to find anything to suit him, was returning north when he came upon the band engaged in the attack on Don Garcia's carriage.

It was a month before Harry Denham was convalescent. The surgeon had fortunately found and extracted the ball from his hip on the day following his arrival at the hacienda ; but he had for several days lain between life and death. Then youth and a constitution hardened by hard exercise, and the life he had been leading, triumphed, and he slowly recovered. Don Garcia had been unremitting in his attention to him ; Isabella had visited his sick-room several times each day, and had seen to his comforts. When he began to recover, the father and daughter talked over what should be done for him.

Many times indeed they had discussed how they could best recognise the service that he had done for them. After hearing from him his story they felt that he would strongly resent the offer of any pecuniary payment. But one day when he had been saying that he liked the life he had been leading, and that although without capital it could not be said to be a paying one, it seemed to him that there was a fascination about the constant adventure

and excitement, the life in the open air, and the hard exercise, that as soon as he got well enough to take part in it again, he should look for a fresh berth, Don Garcia said to his daughter, "Do you know, last night a scheme occurred to me by which he will better his fortunes without hurting his feelings."

"What is that, father?" she asked eagerly.

"You know that we have been having constant bothers with the new people of the north, and several of our vaqueros have been killed, and I can obtain no redress, for the white cowboys all declare that the vaqueros are the aggressors. This young fellow is accustomed to the work, and I don't think that I could do better than place him in charge of the northern herds, paying him by commission on their increase, giving him say a third. The thing would be mutually advantageous to us. I should let him choose his own hands, and he could either take vaqueros or American cowboys, and I should get rid of a great deal of trouble, while he, in a few years, would have a good chance of making a fortune. I believe there are some 20,000 head of cattle up there, for the most part cows, and the increase, if they were well managed, should be 15,000 a year. Perhaps the best way would be to give him half, and let him pay his own hands."

Isabella's face showed that she heartily approved of the plan, and the next day, when Harry was called into the veranda, Don Garcia proposed it to him. "It will be a mutual accommodation to us, Señor Denham," he said, after unfolding the plan. "I have had continual trouble there for the last three years, and it has lately been getting intolerable. The Americans care nothing for our vaqueros; but if we work cattle on their system with white men or with a mixture of whites and vaqueros, we should have no more trouble. What do you say?"

"I can only say that I gratefully accept your offer, señor; it is a magnificent chance for me, far better than

anything that I have ever dreamt of. I know that herds are often worked on shares, but not a herd so large as yours. I accept your offer gratefully."

"Well, you must make haste and get strong again, so as to take charge before I have any fresh troubles. Here comes my daughter, she will be pleased to hear that the matter is arranged."

A month later Harry Denham entered upon his duties as overseer of the northern herds. He had already sent a message to some of the best men on the ranche on which he had worked, and they had at once thrown up their berths and joined him. He had also six vaqueros chosen from those working on the estates; these he had only selected after he had gained strength enough to ride out with the herds, and had seen them at work. A negro cook completed the outfit. Don Garcia had advanced him a sum of money for the payment and keep of the men, until the sales of animals should commence. One of the cowboys who had before been boss of an outfit was appointed as head of the party. Harry himself had to look after the general supervision and provisioning; for although able to sit on a horse, he was unfit for the hard work of a cowboy's life, and in order to avoid the heat of the plain he erected a hut for himself among the hills some five miles from the headquarters of the outfit.

Here he would be able to do a little hunting and shooting, so as to vary the diet of the camp, while he was conveniently situated, riding over to the hacienda seven miles away to procure supplies. Six months passed; everything had gone well; the work of branding the calves was over, and had passed off without trouble. He had found that it was impossible to prevent the cattle at times from wandering from the limits of the estate or to restrain others from entering it; he had therefore, with Don Garcia's approval, adopted the system in use at the American ranches, by which the cattle were by no means confined



“The great assemblage of all the cattle, known as the round up.”

to a certain tract of land, but wandered indiscriminately, sometimes mixing with other herds, and being separated only once in six months, on the occasion of the great assemblage of all the cattle, known as the round up.

At the hacienda Denham was received most cordially by Don Garcia, who always insisted on his coming in and smoking a cigar with him, and who, after the usual report as to the state of the herd, asked many questions as to his own country. Isabella was generally present, or if out of the room when he first came, was sure to appear, shortly followed by a servant with a jug of cooling drink, which she would herself pour out and place before her father and Harry. Six months after he had commenced his duties as overseer, Don Garcia said to him, "I told you the errand from which we were returning when you rescued us from those brigands."

"Yes, señor, it was the question of the marriage of the señoretta."

"That affair is quite over now; the young man wrote very handsomely, saying that he would do everything in his power to curb his hasty temper, assuring her that he loved her passionately. I was touched by his letter, which my daughter showed me, and by one which I myself received from his father, and was in favour of giving the young man a chance; but as my daughter is even more determined than before to have nothing to say to him, I fear that it will cause a quarrel between the two families."

"I should say that that was of very slight consequence compared with the happiness of your daughter, señor. In our country a father may object to his daughter marrying a person of whom he does not approve, and may even, according to law, prevent her doing so before she comes of age; but he would never dream of compelling her to marry a man to whom she objected—he would have no shadow of right to do so."

"With us matters are settled by the parents, Don Henry," the Spaniard said gravely, "and I think it is far better so in most cases; but having lost my wife many years ago, and Isabella being my only child, I have been too indulgent, and let her have too completely her own way, and I certainly could not bring myself to offer her the alternative of taking the veil or marrying the man I choose for her."

"But I understand, señor, that although you at first thought of this Don Pedro as your son-in-law, you yourself, on closer acquaintance with him, felt that he would not make the Señoretta Isabella happy."

"Yes, that is so; but I think that I was a little hasty and harsh; his letter is a charming one."

Harry Denham remained silent.

"No one could have written better," the Don went on, and there was an interrogation in his tone.

"I do not know Don Pedro, señor. As for writing a charming letter, it seems to me that any one could do that. I cannot help thinking that the señoretta, who is good and kind to every one, would not have taken such a strong objection to him without there being some good reason for so doing."

"It is a caprice on her part," the Don said irritably; "he has good manners, he is handsome, rich, and of a family equal to her own. He is passionate, I admit, and I do not like his ways with his slaves and peons, but, after all, I suppose there is no one perfect."

"I should think, señor," Harry said quietly, "that your daughter, who loves you dearly, as all can see, would not have opposed your wishes upon a mere caprice; a man who is harsh to his servants, or even to a horse or a dog, would be likely to be harsh to his wife."

"Well, at any rate, it is settled," the Spaniard said, lighting a fresh cigar with short irritable puffs; "I have this morning sent off a letter of regret to my friend, saying

that my daughter's inclinations remain unchanged, and that, as her happiness is my first consideration, it is impossible that the proposed match can take place. Now, I suppose, I shall have trouble. It is too annoying, coming just when I have got rid of the troubles with the Americans. Somehow one never seems to have peace."

Looking round the luxuriously furnished room, and thinking of the wide possessions and easy life that he led, Harry had difficulty in repressing a smile at the querulous tone of the complaint. The conversation was in Spanish, which Denham had learned to speak fluently during his five years' residence on the plain, where, among his companions, were generally a proportion of Mexicans.

The next evening, as he was sitting with his men after his supper was over and their pipes lighted, he said, "By the way, do any of you know anything about a young Mexican named Pedro de Vaga? His father's hacienda is some eighty miles to the south."

"I know the place," one of the men said: "it is a big estate, not so large as this in point of size, but better land, and he owns a good many more slaves than Don Garcia does. I was working down near there two years ago, and I heard a good many stories of this Don Pedro. The old man, they say, is a kind master; but the young one is a tyrant, and his people are looking forward with dread to the time when he will be boss of the estate. Fortunately for them he is not very much there, being fond of going to the big towns, where he gambles, they say, heavily. I have heard that when he comes into them it will require a large slice of the estates to pay off the money-lenders, though his father has paid large sums for him over and over again. I heard that he was at New Orleans three years ago, and was lucky in getting off on board a ship before he was arrested; so that it must have been something pretty bad, as they are not squeamish at New Orleans."

"He is a very bad man," one of the vaqueros, who spoke a little English, put in. "I worked on the estate four years back, and he was the worst sort of a fellow. He has had a slave flogged to death more than once. A man pretty nearly put an end to him; he struck him one day in a fit of passion, and Lobe pulled out his knife and laid his shoulder open with the first blow, and would have killed him with the next had he not pulled out his pistol and shot him dead. It was a pity that Lobe bungled the first stroke. There was a rumour some months ago that our señorita was going to marry him; he and his father came over here, and Don Garcia took her down there. *Caramba!* I would have put my knife between his ribs, if I swung for it afterwards, rather than see a pretty young lady sacrificed to him."

"Right you are, Nunez," the cowboy who had first spoken said; "you may count me in; the señorita is a daisy, you bet, and if there is any talk of this marriage, I am with you in anything you may do to stop it."

Donna Isabella was indeed immensely popular among the men, and on the occasion of a round up, or of any assemblage of the herds, she would be sure to be there, with her attendant behind her, watching the proceedings with the greatest interest, and flushing with excitement over any deed of daring horsemanship. She had several times been out to the northern camp since it had been formed, and would stand by her horse, by the circle round the fire, asking questions as to the work, and chatting brightly with the men, all whom she knew by name, and before she rode away would be sure to produce from a basket a bottle or two of pulque, a quantity of fruit, or some other luxury.

"I am glad to tell you, Don Henry," the Mexican said one day a month after his conversation with Harry Denham, "that the matter I spoke to you of has passed off without trouble. I received an answer shortly after-

wards from Don Ramon, saying that he deeply regretted my daughter's decision, but that, as I was unwilling to use my authority as her father, he could but acquiesce in it. Three days ago I received a manly letter from his son, saying that deeply as he regretted the destruction of his fondest hopes, he trusted that the circumstance would not lead to any breach in the friendship between the two families, and he hoped to be allowed to pay me a visit in order to assure me of his undiminished regard. Nothing could be more excellent than the tone of his letter, and of course I have answered it in the same spirit."

Harry Denham made no remark, but when alone that evening in the hut he thought deeply over it. The style of letter was in such entire contradiction to what he had heard of Don Pedro's character, that it filled him with distrust. The man was probably fond of Donna Isabella ; that he could easily understand ; but he doubtless had reckoned upon the dowry he would receive with her to repair his own fortune, and perhaps to silence pressing creditors, until at the death of Don Garcia he would come into a noble inheritance. It was therefore certain that his decisive rejection would not only humiliate him, but rouse him to fury. This letter, then, could only be a cloak to hide his real sentiments, and his proposed visit certainly foreboded no good to Isabella.

Harry Denham was perfectly conscious that he loved the Spanish girl. Her kindness to him when ill, her bright companionship during his convalescence, and the frank welcome that she gave him whenever he went to the hacienda, completely won his heart. He did not for a moment dream that anything could come of it. She and her father were grateful to him for the service that he had rendered them. They were good enough to treat him as a friend rather than as an inferior, and the position that they had given him was a substantial proof of their gratitude ; but that he, her father's overseer, could aspire

to the hand of one of the richest heiresses in Texas, was simply absurd.

That, however, need not prevent his doing what he could to shield her from being molested or annoyed by this Don Pedro, who was, by all accounts, in every respect unworthy of her. There was no saying what such a fellow might do. Her fortune was evidently of the most importance to him, and heiresses had been carried off in Texas and Mexico as well as elsewhere. One day a month later he shot an unusually fine mountain lion in a ravine a mile from his hut, and having carefully skinned the animal, he had it prepared by the wife of one of the vaqueros, who was famous for her skill in such matters, and then took it over on his next visit to the hacienda as a present to Isabella. The girl was in the garden as he rode up, and was delighted with the skin.

"It is one of the finest that I have ever seen," she said, "and there is not a single scratch on it. Most of the skins are disfigured by the wounds the animals give each other in their fights."

"I fancy he must have been a young one," Harry said, "though so immensely large."

"I do not even see a bullet mark."

"No, it does not show. I came upon it suddenly, and had just time to drop my rifle in my hand and fire, as it was about to spring. The ball struck it just in the centre of its throat, so that when the skin was divided the cut passed through the bullet hole."

As they were speaking there was a step behind them, and turning, Harry Denham saw a remarkably handsome man who had just come out of the house unnoticed. He was regarding him with an evil look, but the expression vanished at once, as Isabella also turned, and he said courteously, "I have come, señora, on the part of my father, who is somewhat indisposed, or he would have accompanied me to pay my respects to Don Garcia and yourself."

"You are welcome, Don Pedro," the girl said coldly; "my father will always be glad to see the son of his old friend, Don Ramon de Vaga. This is Don Henry Denham, the gentleman who saved my father and myself when attacked by brigands on return from your father's. Don Henry, this is Don Pedro de Vaga."

It seemed for a moment that the Spaniard was going to speak, but he pressed his lips together and made the



"Shot an unusually fine mountain lion."

slightest inclination of his head in reply to the equally distant salutation of Harry.

"Let us go into the house," the girl said. "You will come in, of course, Señor Denham, and show my father the beautiful skin that you have brought me."

"Thank you, señora, but I have to ride out to the camp at once; there are several matters I have to attend to at once." So saying, he sprang on to his horse and lifted his solbero and rode off.

Don Pedro did not speak as he re-entered the house with Isabella. He knew that if he did so, he should ruin any chance that he might have of winning her by fair means. A feeling of passionate jealousy had seized him as he saw the girl standing by the side of this stranger and heard her chatting pleasantly with him, and the changed manner and tone as she had addressed him added to his anger. By the time that they entered the room where Don Garcia was sitting, he had mastered himself.

"Look at this lovely lion's skin that Don Henry has brought me," she said, going over to her father and showing him the skin, that she had got over her arm.

"Yes, it is a beautiful skin," he said, examining it closely; "there is not a blemish in it. He shot it himself, I suppose?"

"Yes, in that ravine that runs from the valley half a mile from this house. Fortunately the shot struck it in the centre of the throat, and so you see it did not hurt the skin."

"Who is this gentleman?" Don Pedro asked quietly of the haciendorer. "My father heard from you on your return that you had got into some trouble with some rough men, and that there was a skirmish between them and some young fellow—I think you said an English cowboy—who intervened in the matter."

"I did not put it at all in that way, Don Pedro, nor was the affair so trifling as you represent. Two of my servants were killed, and the other two bound. I myself had alighted from the coach, and was handing my daughter out under the pistols of these five ruffians, when this gentleman arrived. He shot four of them, and himself received wounds that for some time seemed likely to be fatal. I may at that time have written of him as a cowboy; but I had not at that time learned, as I have since done, that he is a gentleman of an honourable family in

England. He is now overseer of the northern herds on my estates, and in addition to my gratitude for the immense service he rendered us, I have the fullest confidence in him, and esteem for his character."

"Oh, he is an overseer, is he? I thought his attire would hardly be in accordance with the title of Don, by which the señora introduced him. I suppose you have other evidence besides his word as to his family. I believe most of these cowboys claim to be members of noble families."

Don Garcia was about to reply when Isabella broke in passionately: "You are insulting the man who saved my father and myself from the greatest peril, and whom I introduced to you as my friend, Don Pedro. We have the best evidence that he is a gentleman—that of his own manners and conduct, sir—who might be imitated in both these respects with advantage by men who do not hesitate to boast of the purest Spanish blood."

"Silence, Isabella," her father said sternly; "I am here, and able to defend my absent friend. I should have thought, Don Pedro, that professing, as you do, a regard for our family, you would have shared to some extent our gratitude towards a young man who had done us such signal service, instead of sneering at him. With your feeling towards him, however, I have nothing to do; but I expect, at any rate, that courtesy will be shown in my house to any guest I and my daughter choose to invite here."

Don Pedro bowed in silence, and then the Spaniard went on more cordially: "Do not let us make too much of this, Don Pedro. Of course, you were not fully aware of our obligation to this gentleman, or you would not have spoken as you did. Let us forget the matter altogether," and he at once began to talk upon another subject.

Three days later Don Pedro left, after a stormy interview with Isabella.

"I see that it is of no use remaining longer," he said.

"I came here in hopes that, in spite of your prejudice against me, I might still succeed in winning your love. I see now that it is useless, and can understand the real reason of your refusal of it. I am not blind ; and when I heard you speaking to that young Englishman as you had never spoken to me, I comprehended the whole matter."

The girl flushed angrily.

"You insult me," she said. "I am not one of your slaves, Don Pedro ; and my father will not forgive any one, whosoever he may be, who insults his preserver. As to your insinuation, it is contemptible. You know full well I informed my father, after your first visit here, that nothing would induce me to marry you, and I would rather enter a convent than do so. My visit to your house confirmed me in that determination ; but at that time I had never even seen this Englishman. Your insinuation proves to me how rightly I judged your character. I would rather marry the lowest peon on my father's estate than you. You are here on false pretences, sir. You declared in your letter to my father that you acquiesced in his and my decision, and that you wished to come only as a friend ; it seems now that this was false."

"It was false, señora, and I intend to make you my wife. You may be cruel, you may be unjust, you may even love another, but that will not turn me from my purpose. Mine you shall be, by all the saints ;" and, without waiting to hear the indignant reply, he left the room.

"I am going, Don Garcia," he said abruptly, as he met the latter coming from the stables. "My love is stronger than my power of repressing it. I had hoped that I had to some extent conquered it, but I cannot do so, and it may be, Don Garcia, that you may some day be sorry that you did not give my suit the support that my father and I hoped and expected. I understand now the reason of my refusal. There is another more fortunate than I am, and

you may some day bitterly regret that your kindness of heart led you to open your doors to an adventurer ;” and without waiting he hurried forward to the stable, called for his horse, and ordered the three men who had accompanied him to saddle at once and follow him, and then rode furiously away. He drew rein after riding a mile, and waited until his followers came up. He called one of them up to him, and with him went slowly on, the other two falling behind.

“You have followed the orders I gave you the first day we came here, Juan ?”

“I have, sir ; I have found out all about him : he does not live with the others at the camp, but has a small hut in a lonely valley some miles from here ; he shoots and hunts early in the morning, and then generally he breakfasts, and afterwards rides over to the camp.”

“That is excellent. I want you to stay behind here, Juan, and put a stop to his riding—you understand. You will be well paid for the business.”

The man nodded. “I will do it, señor. It is rather risky, for they say that he is a first-rate shot.”

“Well, then, you must manage so that he doesn’t get a shot at you, Juan. He is alone in the hut ?”

“Yes, except that he has a dog Don Garcia gave him, a fierce beast that would let no one into the hut without awakening its master. It cannot be done that way. When he is away I must hide in the bushes near his hut, and shoot him as he returns.”

“Well, don’t blunder over the business, Juan. If you are doubtful about yourself, hire a man or two to help you, there is never any difficulty in picking up a man for that sort of work.”

“I can put my hand on the men. My brother was one of those who made the attack on Don Garcia and his daughter, and this Englishman shot him, therefore I should be ready to do the job without being paid for it, though I

don't say it is not sweeter to get both gold and revenge at one stroke. I know where the two men who got away are, and they will be glad to join me; they are but two days' ride away, but I suppose a few hours earlier or later would make no difference to you. It is on the road back to the hacienda."

"That will do very well. Mind you do not bring my name into the matter with them; simply say you want to revenge your brother's death."

"I understand, señor," and Juan dropped back to his comrades. Before the end of the day, however, Don Pedro had formed another plan, which he communicated to Juan that evening.

"You understand," he said, "you will get those two men you spoke about, and half-a-dozen others; I shall get eight or ten of our own men, say twenty in all—that will be enough. My business must be settled first; after we have gone, you and the other two can carry out this affair with that accursed Englishman. There will be no risk in it, for when I have once got the girl, Don Garcia will be glad enough to hush up the affair."

Three weeks afterwards Harry Denham was preparing his breakfast, which consisted of slices of venison that he had shot an hour before, when the dog suddenly pricked up its ears with a low warning growl.

"What is it, Don? Is some one coming? Yes, you are right," he went on, after stopping to listen for a moment, "I can hear horses' hoofs." He went to the door, and opening it, looked out; then he gave a sudden exclamation, ran in and seized his rifle, and then ran out again. At a distance of a hundred yards Isabella Novales was riding at full gallop, while half that distance behind were some twenty horsemen, evidently in hot pursuit of her.

"Go in, Don," he said sternly as the dog was about to leap forward; "go in and lie down."



"I struck Violetta sharply and she galloped off like an arrow."

The girl drew up her horse suddenly as she reached the hut, and leaped off.

"Lead the horse in, señora," Harry exclaimed, as leveling his rifle he fired, and one of the horsemen fell from his saddle, while a yell of rage broke from the others. There was not a moment to be lost, and running in he closed the door and fastened the stout bar across it; then catching up a double-barrelled gun, he thrust it through the window and discharged both barrels into the crowd as they rode up. Two more men fell. The rest dismounted, and flung themselves against the door, but three shots of a revolver through a small sliding panel caused them to draw back, and a moment later, in spite of the angry shouts of one of their number, they ran off with their horses, and taking refuge in the bushes, opened a straggling fire on the hut.

"What does it all mean, señora?" Harry asked, turning to the girl, who had without a moment's hesitation seized the rifle he had dropt, and began to load it from a powder-horn hanging from a peg in the wall.

"I don't know," she said. "I was out for a ride this morning, when a number of mounted men suddenly dashed out from a clump of trees, and I saw another party ride out of some bushes farther on, evidently intending to cut me off. From the glimpse I had of them it seemed to me that their faces were all blackened. I turned my horse to ride back, but some more men had posted themselves there. I struck Violetta sharply and she galloped off like an arrow. I had to pass close to one of the party, and I was afraid they might lasso me. One man did take up his lariat as he galloped, but another shouted, 'No, ride her down,' and I shot by them, though they were within a few yards of me.

"I thought of the camp, but I knew that at this hour most of the men would be out with the herds. Then I thought of your hut. I knew it was up this valley, though

I had never been here. I was sure that if you were in you would protect me ; if you were not, I should have ridden on. They must be brigands who intended to carry me off to get a ransom for me ; but it seemed to me when that man shouted to the others not to lasso me, that I knew his voice, and I feel almost sure it was Don Pedro. He said when he went away he would marry me some day, and I cannot help thinking that perhaps he has made up his mind to carry me off. What is to be done, señor ? I would kill myself rather than fall into his hands. Why should he want to marry a girl who hates him ?”

“Because, as I hear, he wants money, señora. I hear that he has very heavy debts, and has already gambled away much of the estate that will come to him at his father's death. Now, señora, I must send a few shots back in answer to their fire, or they will be making another rush, and the door was never made to stand a serious assault. I only hope that if Don Pedro is there he will let me get a shot at him.”

He took out some moss that had been thrust into several chinks in the wall, and fired several shots into the bush. A loud yell told that at least one had taken effect.

“That will do for the present,” he said ; “now let us think over what had best be done. I fear there is little chance of this firing being heard ; the herd is eight or ten miles away. Your horse is fast, and you might possibly get there before you were overtaken ; but some of these men will be well mounted, and it would be a risk. They have stopped firing, but are certainly round the hut, and might lasso you before you had gone twenty yards. If I had my horse here I could have ridden with you, and could have beaten off any well-mounted men who might come up ; but he was grazing a hundred yards away when I came in, and there is no getting at him. I see nothing to do but to wait and see what they intend to do next. If they were only brigands they might give it up ; but if your

suspicious are correct, and they have Don Pedro with them, I fear there is no chance of that. I know a cave, four miles away, that I could hold against them for any time, while this hut is not meant to stand a siege, but there is no getting there."

"What are you growling at, Don ? Do you hear some one creeping up there ?"

A moment later there were three crashes as a heap of faggots were thrown down against the end of the hut. He sprang towards that direction, pushed the moss from a loop-hole, and thrusting his rifle out, shot a man who was approaching with a blazing brand.

"Too late," he exclaimed bitterly a minute afterwards, "it has fired the dry grass ; the wind is towards us, and those faggots will be kindled, and the flames will light the dry shingles."

"I will go out and surrender," Isabella said suddenly ; "you shall not throw away your life, Don Henry."

"Your surrender would not save my life, señora, even if I were to venture to make the sacrifice. I have killed five or six of them, and you may be sure that they would not spare me."

"Then let us both get on to my horse and try to escape ; she is very fast."

"We should be overtaken before we had gone half a mile, even if we had a fair start. She is a pretty thing, but light, and would soon tire under the double weight. Let me think for a minute ;" he closed his eyes and stood in thought.

Already the pungent odour of the smoke filled the room, and there was a cracking noise, increasing in volume every moment, that told the faggots had caught fire. Suddenly he looked up.

"I have it, señora, if you will not mind doing it."

"I will do anything you tell me to do," she said quietly.

"The horse is getting restive ; I will hold him as you go to the other end of the room and take off your dress, and wrap in it the pillow and blankets as quickly as you can. As soon as you have done so, I will mount your horse, open the door, and ride out with the dummy in front of me. Seeing your dress, they will naturally suppose that it is you, and will all dash off in pursuit of me. I shall make for the cave I spoke of. They are principally below us, and would cut me off from making either for the hacienda or the camp. The moment they are fairly after me, do you make your way off on foot. If you can catch my horse, you might get me help from the camp.

"You will be throwing away your life, señor."

"Not at all. I am a heavy weight for your mare, but I think she will carry me as far as the cave, and they will not like to fire lest they might, as they would suppose, hurt you. At any rate it is a chance for us both, and I see no other. Pray do not lose a moment."

"I will do it," she said.

The hut was full of blinding smoke, the dog barked and howled, and the mare struggled so violently that he had the greatest difficulty in pacifying her. When at last he did so, she was trembling from head to foot. It was not two minutes before Isabella stood beside him and thrust the bundle into his arms.

"I have pulled the blankets up above the dress," she said, "and pinned my riding-hat on the top. Quick, it is stifling here." Then she passionately threw her arms around his neck. "The Holy Virgin shield you !" she exclaimed. "I love you, Harry, I love you. I have brought this upon you, and if you die I will remain a widow all my life for your sake."

"God bless you, Isabella," he said hoarsely.

Isabella took down the bar and unlocked the door. The mare for a moment refused to move. He leaned forward on her neck and struck the spurs into her, and

she flew like an arrow through the door, at which the dog had already rushed out with a joyous bark. Harry Denham had slung his double-barrelled gun across his shoulder. In one hand he held his revolver, which he had recharged after using it; in the other the reins, and pressed the dummy figure against him. A loud shout burst from the bushes as he issued out.



“A loud shout burst from the bushes as he issued out.”

“Don’t fire, on your lives, don’t fire,” a man shouted; “you might hit the lady.”

A dozen horsemen sprung out, but most of them were just below the hut, being sure that when the defenders sallied out they would make that way. There were but three that barred the way up the valley. Harry rode right at them. One made a grasp at his rein, but the revolver cracked out and he pitched head foremost out of the

saddle. When he was past them, turning round he fired again, and one dropped the reins with an oath as the ball struck him in the shoulder. The other reined in his horse until joined by his comrades from below.

"Steady, steady, keep together," their leader shouted. "We must have them; the mare will soon tire."

To their surprise, although they were riding their hardest, the mare for three miles maintained the lead of some seventy yards that she had gained.

"*Caramba!*" the leader of the pursuers muttered, "she must be the devil; no horse her size could carry double weight so far without failing." But although far less heavily loaded than her pursuers imagined, Harry's weight was telling, and he could feel that the mare was beginning to flag. He cheered her on with hand and voice, abstaining from using the spur, for the gallant little horse was doing her best. He would not look round, for that would have encouraged his pursuers, and they might press their horses to make a rush; but listening intently, he was sure that they were gaining somewhat upon him, and he was confirmed in his belief by a shout of triumph behind. The cave, however, was now but a short distance away. The valley had narrowed to a ravine, occupied in the rainy season by a torrent. The pursuers, confident that the end was not far off, and that the mare would ere long founder, had not pressed their horses, and as they could no longer ride more than two abreast, they had fallen somewhat farther back.

Those in front gave a yell of exultation as they saw the mare suddenly stop and the rider leap from its back, but were astonished when they saw him go to the horse's head and apparently lead it into the solid rock, followed by the dog, which had kept close to its heels. They rode cautiously now, not knowing what to expect, and checked their horses, when they saw an opening no more than a yard wide in the face of the rock, and realised that the

fugitives had taken refuge within it. Volleys of execrations poured from the leader of the band. He at once ordered the men to dismount, which they did willingly enough, but they refused to attempt to enter the cleft.

"It would be certain death," one of them said; "he has got a double-barrelled gun and that pistol, and he can shoot us down the moment we appear before the hole."

The fact was so evident that the leader, although half mad with passion, saw that it was useless to urge them to the attack at present.

"Well, we must think of some plan," he said. "There is no hurry, they cannot escape us; we are in the heart of the hills, and no one dreams of what has taken place. We burnt them out of their last place, and if we can find no other way, we can starve them out of this. They can eat the horse, but they can't go very long without water. You may as well get some food out of your sacks and make a meal while we think the matter over."

The men obeyed sullenly. They had entered on the affair solely for the money they were to receive for it, and it had turned out most disastrous: there were twenty of them to begin with, while there were now but thirteen—six had been killed and one wounded. They were, however, somewhat cheered when their leader told them that their comrades' shares would be divided among them, and that each would therefore get half as much again as he had expected.

"I will double that," he said, "if you will attack the place."

But there was no response. Presently one of them went up to the leader, who was sitting apart.

"Why not try fire again, señor; we could not burn them out, but we might smoke them out."

"That is a good idea, Juan. Directly the men have finished eating, do you go down with four of them and cut faggots and bring them up; there are plenty of bushes

half a mile lower down. Put plenty of green wood in it ; it is smoke we want and not fire. They will come out quickly enough as soon as we light them ; but if they don't, we must pull the faggots away and drag her out—she would be of no use dead."

Five men went off, the others taking their post, pistol in hand, near the mouth of the cave, should the fugitives try to escape. The men had taken their horses with them to bring up the faggots, and half-an-hour later the sound of horses' hoofs was heard coming fast up the ravine.

"They have been wonderfully quick about it," Juan said to the leader uneasily.

"They have ; they may have found bushes enough on the lower side of the ravine without going right down to the bottom."

"I did not notice any, señor—and listen, it seems to me that noise is more than five horses would make."

"So it is. Stand to your horses, men."

A moment later the head of the party came in sight. There was a shout in English of "Come along, lads, here are the skunks." For a moment the men could not believe their eyes, for by the side of a cowboy rode a female figure. She was in her white petticoats, and had on a scarlet shirt, strapped at the waist by a belt ; her head was bare, and though nearly a hundred yards away, Don Pedro recognised at once Isabella Novales. A terrible oath broke from his lips.

"Forward, men," he shouted, "ride for your lives ; we have been duped, and the girl has brought these cowboys upon us."

At the head of his men Don Pedro dashed up the ravine, but as he passed the opening to the cave, a flash of fire spurted out and struck him on the side of the head with a full charge of heavy shot, and he fell dead from his horse. The man Juan, who followed him, met with the

same fate ; but the others dashed past, and a minute later eight cowboys galloped in pursuit. Isabella Novales drew her horse aside to let them pass, and then sprang to the ground. Her fears of Henry's safety had been allayed. She learned from one of the five men whom they had seized just as they began to cut brushwood, that he had gained the cave, and that, not daring to attack it, his foes were about to smoke him out. The news had gained him his life. The cowboys were afraid to fire lest the sound should reach the ears of the brigands, but they had without a moment's loss of time strung the other four up by their lariats to a tree growing close to the spot where they had been captured.

"Are you safe, my beloved?" she said, as she threw herself into Harry's arms with the passionate abandon of her race.

"Quite safe," he replied; "you have saved me, Isabella. I was close to the mouth of the cave and could hear them talking, and I knew that unless help came in time it was all over. Your mare carried me splendidly; but another half-mile and they would have had me. I and my gun made up nearly twice the weight she is accustomed to carry. And you, how did you manage? I see that you went to the camp."

"I threw myself down close to the door for a moment to get fresh air, then I ran out. At first I thought of making for the hacienda, but it was two miles farther; they would be too long in getting ready. I luckily came upon your horse, mounted it, and galloped to your camp. When I rode in, the men had just finished their breakfast, and had already mounted; another two minutes and they would have gone. I told my story. One of them ran into the tent and brought me a shirt and a belt, which I was very glad to put on, though till then I had never thought for a moment about being so undressed before a number of men. We galloped as if we had been racing.

We passed the hut, or what was the hut, for there was nothing of it but a smoking beam or two. Just above that we passed a dead man lying on the ground, and the cowboy who was riding next to me said, 'Cheer up, señora, that is Harry Denham's handiwork; he has ridden through them here.'

"Is not that," she broke off, as she looked at the two dead men lying close to her, "Don Pedro? it looks to me like his figure."

Harry went and turned the bodies over.

"You are right," he said, "it is he; Don Pedro will never trouble you again. Now let us mount and go slowly down; the others will overtake us presently. I doubt whether they will overtake the brigands. They have ridden nine miles at full speed, and the other horses have had more than one hour's rest."

They mounted, and rode down the ravine, the dog trotting behind them.

"I can hardly believe that I have not dreamt what you said in the hut, dearest."

She coloured brightly.

"You knew it before, and I knew what you thought." Then she added shyly, "I shall tell my father directly we get in."

"I am afraid that he will never consent," Harry said gravely.

"He loves me," she said confidently; "I am his only child, and he will do as I wish him. You are a gentleman by birth, Harry—what can he want more? If you were as rich as I am, what good would it be?"

Harry shook his head.

"That is true enough, Isabella; but fathers do not see things in that light. However, I will ride with you home, and leave you to tell your story. If he says no, as I fear he will, I must leave here; I cannot remain as his overseer after this."

"If you were as faint-hearted in fighting as you are in love," the girl said with a bright smile, "you would never have won me. I do believe you would never have spoken had not I spoken first."

"I am sure I never should," he replied. "I have known for months that I loved you. It would not have been right that I, one of your father's overseers, should ever speak of my love to his daughter."

The cowboys came up presently and crowded round Harry Denham, shaking hands with him warmly.

"We wiped out five of the skunks," one of them said, "but the others were too well mounted for us. If we had had time to choose our horses, not one of them would have got away."

"It does not matter," Harry said; "the man who was the author of all this has fallen. The rest were only hired brigands, and they have paid heavily for it."

"Are you coming to the camp, Harry?"

"Not at present, I must conduct the señora home; but I may be out this evening."

The men exchanged a significant glance, and when the way separated at the charred remains of the hut, one said, "We shall not see much more of Denham at the camp. I don't know what the Don will say about it, but there is no mistake about the señora. Poor little thing, how white she was when she rode up! She looks all right again now, and has got plenty of colour in her cheeks; but she was as pale as death then. She didn't say much, but there was no question where her heart was."

When Harry Denham left Isabella, he promised her that he would return in two hours and wait at the gate until she came to him. She was there before him, and he saw at once that she had judged her father better than he had.

"Come in, Harry," she said, "my father is expecting you."

Don Garcia came out to meet them as they approached the house.

"Don Harry, you have saved her life, at the risk of your own, twice," he said, "and you have fairly won her ; I give her to you willingly. It would have been a blow to my pride, had you not been a man of good family, but I could not have said no to her even then. As it is, there is nothing I can wish for better. Money she has no need for ; but she has need of an honest gentleman as her protector, and such she has found in you."

Three months later they were married. Till Don Garcia's death ten years later, they lived with him always at the hacienda. After that Harry Denham took his wife to Europe for six months, and then returned to Texas, into which a flood of immigration was pouring. There he still lives, one of the richest and most popular land-owners in the State.

THE END



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